

People of the Way



Selected Essays and Addresses

by

JOHN A. TOEWS

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John A. Toews

Edited by

Abe J. Dueck

Herbert Giesbrecht

Allen R. Guenther

Published by

Historical Committee

Board of Higher Education

Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

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John A. Toews

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PREFACE

John A. Toews was many things to many people. To churchmen he was an advocate and defender of the church; to historians he ably portrayed the developments in the Mennonite Brethren Church; to peacemakers he was a brave champion; to many believers he was a spiritual father.

With the untimely death of this "defender of the faith" it was felt that his influence could reach into the coming generations more effectively if some of his articles, sermons and lectures were collected into one book. Dr. Abe J. Klassen of Fresno, California, first brought this idea to the attention of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference Historical Commission. There it was decided to ask the Historical Committee of Canada to work on this project; the Historical Committee gladly accepted this labour of love.

In discussing the project with the family, it was felt that some of John Toews' most recent colleagues at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College would be very able and suitable editors for a book of this kind. Dr. Abe Dueck (Chairman), Herbert Giesbrecht and Dr. Allen Guenther worked with dedication and diligence to prepare this collection. We thank them in particular for their efforts. Special additional features are an excellent biography written by Dr. David Ewert, of Fresno, California, and a detailed bibliography prepared by Herbert Giesbrecht, Librarian at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

Helmut T. Huebert, Chairman
Historical Committee of the
Mennonite Brethren Churches
of Canada
April, 1981

FOREWORD

The passing of John A. Toews in January 1979 was an event which brought a profound sense of loss to many people both inside and outside the Mennonite Brethren Church. We cannot, however, forever contemplate that loss; we can only seek to minimize its effect by carrying on the work which he left for others to do and by preserving and sharing the insights of his fruitful ministry. This volume represents one attempt to do so.

The members of the Editorial Committee who were asked to select and edit materials by John A. Toews in recognition of his service to the church all enjoyed a close personal acquaintance with him. Some of us eagerly listened to his dynamic preaching while we were still young lads; we were all students of his at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College—sitting under his instruction in classes in Systematic Theology, Acts, or Mennonite History. All eventually had the good fortune to become his colleagues at the College—and learned to share his concern for the Mennonite Brethren Conference which he served so faithfully during most of his life.

The process of selecting representative articles from the extensive materials available was a difficult one. The Committee adopted a number of criteria to guide it. The materials, we felt, should highlight the main issues, such as Mennonite Brethren history and identity and the question of nonresistance to which Toews devoted so much of his time, without unnecessarily duplicating materials currently available. The scope of his interests and concerns, however, was much broader than those with which he was most frequently associated. Even in his later years of teaching at the College he was anxious to teach courses in Bible, such as Acts or General Epistles, where his profound concern for biblical faithfulness found constant expression. He was always deeply concerned about evangelism and missions, about

practical expressions of Christian love and about education. This volume is an attempt to reflect the diverse interests and concerns that occupied Toews's mind and called forth some of his best writing.

All of us change in the course of our lives, and Toews was no exception. He was aware of changes in his life and wanted to be open to change as God gave him new insights. Nevertheless, a strong continuity and a remarkable degree of consistency remained evident in the contours of his life. This volume contains materials from various periods of his active ministry which reflect how Toews spoke to the issues of the time. Occasionally later statements reflect modified opinions or emphases. It is helpful for us who view his life to be aware of the changes in his life.

The Committee felt, however, that J.A. Toews would not have wished to have his work preserved for its own sake. The main emphasis must lie in its potential for further instruction and edification of the church. Toews was well-educated and spent most of his life in academic institutions, but he always viewed his task primarily in relation to the church rather than in relation to the academic community. This orientation is also reflected in his writings which were seldom directed primarily to the academic community. He was a man of the people and excelled in bringing the insights of the academic community to the people in a form which they could digest and apply. Lectures on Anabaptism, for example, were always punctuated by sermonic illustrations. Whether writing or speaking, Toews always sought to communicate with the entire Brotherhood and spoke and wrote with passion. He was fluent in both English and German and thus made an invaluable contribution to the church in an era of language transition. Though something is always lost in translation, some items, particularly from the early period of his ministry, were translated because of their general inaccessibility and their distinctive quality.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the assistance of a number of people who helped bring this volume to completion. Typescripts, tapes of sermons and lectures, and letters, were sent to us by a number of individuals, churches, and institutions. Some of these found their way into this volume; others for various reasons did not. They have all been listed in the bibliography and are available in the Mennonite Brethren Archives Center in Winnipeg for those who wish to use them. Articles included in this volume and previously published elsewhere

have been used by special permission. A special word of gratitude is also due Mrs. Velma Doerksen who typed most of the manuscript with competence and care, to Dr. David Ewert for writing the biographical essay, and to Hugo Jantz for translating the first essay.

Finally, we wish to thank the Toews family, especially Mrs. John A. Toews and Dr. John E. Toews, for their encouragement and support. May this volume be an effective vehicle whereby the ministry of their husband and father, and of our colleague, continues to prosper among the People of the Way.

On behalf of the Editorial Committee
Abe J. Dueck

JOHN ARON TOEWS - CHRONOLOGY

15 August 1912	Born in Rueckenau, Russia to Aron A. and Agnes (nee Harms) Toews
12 March 1924	Conversion
1924-26	Zentralschule, Alexanderkrone, Russia
1926-27	Emigrated from Russia and settled with the family in Namaka, Alberta
4 August 1929	Baptized in Namaka
1930-33	Student, Coaldale Bible School
1934-35	Student, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute
9 November 1935	Married to Nettie Willms
1937-40	Student, Tabor College (B.Th., 1940)
1940-46	Instructor at Coaldale Bible School
27 September 1942	Ordained to the ministry in Namaka
Summer 1943	Chaplain to men in Conscientious Objector camps
1946-47	Student, University of Saskatchewan (B.A., 1947)
1947-67	Instructor at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College; President 1956-63
1950	B.D., United College, Winnipeg
1951, 1966, 1973	Periods of ministry in South America
1955	Publication of <i>True Non-resistance Through Christ: A Study of Biblical Principles</i>
1957	M.A., University of Manitoba
1959	Publication of <i>Alternative Service in Canada During World War II</i>

1964	Ph.D., University of Minnesota
1967-68	Ministry in Europe
1968-71	Pastor of Fraserview Mennonite Brethren Church, Vancouver, BC.
1971-72	Writing and lecturing at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA.
1973	Publication of <i>The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church</i>
1972-76	Instructor at Trinity Western College, Langley, BC.
1976-79	Instructor at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College
13 January 1979	Passed away in Winnipeg, Manitoba

JOHN A. TOEWS: IN MEMORIAM

by

David Ewert

Margot Asquith claimed that a well-written life is almost as rare as one well-spent. Those who knew J.A. Toews would agree, I should think, that his life was well-spent. Whether I have written well about him I will leave up to the judgment of the reader. It is not easy to write about a friend who was taken from us only recently. Moreover, it is hard to put into capsule form memories that span nearly four decades in which Toews' life intersected with that of my own.

Since this is but an introductory chapter to a book that honors one of our Mennonite Brethren leaders, we must content ourselves with a brief account of his life and an appreciation of a man who was one of God's gifts to our Brotherhood. Perhaps someone at a later date will take it upon him or herself to write a fuller story of his life. Such a person will have the perspectives that time gives to a life that was lived very much in the public eye—a perspective we cannot have.

EARLY YEARS IN THE UKRAINE

In the fifty years between the 1920's and 1970's many of the leaders of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada were immigrants from the Soviet Union. J.A. Toews was one of them. He had his roots in the soil of the Mennonite "commonwealth" in the Ukraine.

His father, Aron Toews, was a young school teacher in the Molotschna Colony when he married Agnes Harms, from the village of Friedensruh, in the year 1908. The young couple made their home in Rueckenau, where Aron Toews taught in the village school for ten years. In 1918 the family moved to the village of Friedensruh where Toews continued to teach and where he was called and ordained to the ministry of the gospel by what was then known as the *Evangelische Mennoniten Brudergemeinde*.

Before the tumultuous years of war, revolution, famine and the total disruption of life burst upon the Toews family, as Mennonites had known it for more than a hundred years, four children were born to Aron and Agnes Toews: Agnes, Mary, John and Nick. The third child, John Aron Toews, was born in Rueckenau on August 15, 1912, shortly before the First World War which was to have a shattering effect of Czarist Russia and, in fact, bring it to an end.

The Bolshevik Revolution which followed the War and the raids of robber bands on the prosperous Mennonite villages left death and destruction in their wake and convinced the Toews family that Mother Russia held no future for them. Several times during these revolutionary years God had spared family members from imminent death at the hands of terrorists. Moreover, had it not been for God's mercy, the Toewses would not have survived the great famine that struck the Ukraine in the early twenties. By then it had also become obvious that teachers who did not buy into the new regime's ideology lost their jobs and ministers were often the special targets of the Communists' wrath. Since the doors to Canada were still open in 1926, the Aron Toews family joined thousands of others in the great Mennonite exodus from Russia to Canada.

John was fifteen when he left Russia with his parents, his younger brother and his two older sisters. He had received his elementary education in Mennonite village schools during the years when the times were sadly out of joint. Whereas there were gaps in his early schooling, John had a good foundation in the three R's. He spoke German fluently (it was the language of the home) and had a fairly good command of Russian. Also, he had received a good introduction to German literature and later, in his sermons, he would frequently use illustrations from this literature or quote lines of poetry. In Canada he was eager to learn English and, although his accent always betrayed the fact that English was not his first language, he handled it better than many who speak only English.

NEW BEGINNINGS IN WESTERN CANADA

Like many other teachers who came to Canada from Russia, Aron Toews could not continue in his profession. Not only did he not know the English language, but his teaching credentials were not accepted in the new land. And so, like many other immigrant Mennonite teachers, Toews took up farming. About fifty miles southeast of Calgary, Alberta, lay the quiet farming

community of Namaka. Here the Toews family settled down in 1927 together with several other Mennonite Brethren families, not only to eke out an existence for themselves, but also to build up believers in the faith. In earlier years the congregation at Namaka was associated with the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference.

The pioneer years at Namaka were extremely difficult. Drought and other disasters made material progress next to impossible. Then, in 1942, the Toews family had the misfortune of having their farm and home with all their personal belongings, including all the manuscript material for the projected publication on Mennonite martyrs, burn to the ground.

Aron Toews was the leading minister of the Namaka congregation for twenty years, from 1927 to 1947. And even after they moved to Clearbrook, British Columbia, he continued in the preaching ministry until he became totally blind in 1963.

By then they had celebrated their golden wedding anniversary (1958), and a year before Aron Toews died (1969) he and his beloved wife commemorated sixty years of life together. Whereas they had never possessed much of this world's goods, they had passed on a rich heritage of faith to their children.

Aron Toews was a highly respected preacher of the gospel in Mennonite Brethren circles. On numerous occasions he spoke in my home church in Coaldale, Alberta, where two of his brothers lived, and as a young man I was always impressed by his clear presentation of the Word of God. He was a man of deep convictions and expressed these rather boldly. He tended to be quite legalistic and at times that rankled the members of his congregation. By nature he was rather serious, but his good wife had a cheerful disposition and that helped to keep the balance in the Toews home. Aron Toews' two volumes on *Mennonitische Maertyrer* indicate that had he lived in a different generation, he might have made a considerable contribution to evangelical scholarship. That privilege was reserved for his son, John.

This fifteen-year-old boy from the Ukraine, now living on the bald and wind-swept prairies with his parents, learned the discipline of hard work as he shared in the family's burden of earning their daily bread. Whatever John did, he did with considerable zest and concentration. Hard work was to become his way of life.

Through the influence of his godly parents and the instruction from the Scriptures received in church, John had committed his life to Christ even before he left Russia. On March 12, 1924

(he remembered the date), his father showed his son the way to Christ. When he put his own name into Isaiah 53 and read: "He was wounded for 'John's' transgressions, he was bruised for 'John's' iniquities . . . and with his stripes 'John' was healed," the deep assurance of forgiveness came into his heart. Although he was only twelve at the time, his conversion marked the beginning of a life of Christian discipleship. He was to learn later that his initial commitment to Christ had to be confirmed again and again throughout his Christian life. After the family had settled in Namaka, John gave public testimony to his faith and joined the church of his parents through baptism.

Since he had grown up in a Christian home and had accepted many Christian values by osmosis, as it were, John's conversion did not lead to any great noticeable change immediately. Nevertheless, it was a major turning point in his life and it became his firm conviction that much of the weakness of the church stems from fuzzy thinking about the beginning of the Christian life. "Conversion" was to become a common theme in his preaching ministry throughout his life, although he knew from his own experience that a conversion need not follow the Pauline model to be genuine.

As the Aron Toews children grew up, they married (with the exception of Mary, who spent long years in Africa as a missionary) and established their own Christian homes. In the early thirties, while attending the Coaldale Bible Institute, John became attracted to Nettie Willms. Nettie was an orphan who had come to Canada with her brother and sisters and who made their home in Namaka, although she worked in Calgary. Their relationship blossomed into courtship and in 1935 they were married at Namaka. A fierce blizzard raged over the western prairies that day, but this did not dampen their wedding bliss. John's ministry was to be mostly in the public eye; Nettie's, behind the scenes. But throughout their married life, in good days and bad, Nettie stood by her husband, and was a tower of strength to him. One cannot very well think of one without the other. Together they served the Lord for some forty years.

John's father was a minister; his older sister, Agnes, married a minister, Gerhard Thielman, and so it was not at all strange that John as a young man should feel stirrings in his heart to preach the gospel. As opportunities came his way he tried his wings at speaking in public, and was affirmed by members of his home congregation. Fortunately, he realized in time that if God should call him to a teaching/preaching ministry in his

generation he must seek further training.

TRAINING AND SERVICE

After helping his parents on the farm for a number of years, learning English and picking up his schooling where he had dropped it in Russia, John longed to expand his mental horizons and to get a better grasp of the Scriptures. At that time it was almost unheard of that Mennonites went to university, either because their preparatory schooling in Russia did not meet the admission requirements, or because of lack of finances, or because the university was viewed as a serious threat to the faith of Christian students.

As already mentioned, the young student spent three years at the Coaldale Bible Institute. But what to do next? In the city of Calgary, nestled in the foothills of the Rockies, William Aberhardt, later to become Alberta's premier, had established what was known as the Prophetic Bible Institute. Since Calgary was fairly close to Namaka, John enrolled in classes in this non-Mennonite institute — something a bit unusual in his day.

Whereas he learned many good things from godly teachers at this Institute, there were some teachings presented that struck him as strange. Here he was taught, among other things, that Jesus had not come to found the church but to restore Israel to national greatness, and that the Sermon on the Mount was not applicable to believers but represented the laws of the millennial kingdom. Perhaps this helps us to understand why Toews in later years occasionally criticized the dispensational system of interpreting the Bible rather severely. He received an overdose of this kind of teaching at this Institute, and saw its implications for the life of the church.

Mennonite Brethren in Canada had as yet not established a college and so John and his wife, Nettie, decided to enroll at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas. His father was somewhat distraught at the thought of seeing his children leave Namaka, for he had hoped, as he said tearfully, that they might farm together and build a church together. Although John and Nettie rented a farm for two years after they were married, farming was not to be John's calling. They left for Tabor College in 1937.

Tabor College at that time still offered an undergraduate theology program, and so in 1940, after three years of study, John received his Bachelor of Theology degree. He had excelled in his studies and profited greatly from them. In one respect he felt cheated: only he and another student had registered for

Greek, and when the other student withdrew, the class was cancelled. All through his later ministry he regretted the fact that he had not been able to acquire this valuable tool for the study of the Scriptures.

While studying at Tabor College he had the opportunity to preach the Word in churches in the Hillsboro area. For some time he served the Tampa congregation as student pastor. It was also while they were at Tabor that God gave the Toewses their first-born child, a daughter, Elfrieda. Tabor invited alumnus J.A. Toews back in 1950 to give the address to the annual homecoming, and shortly before his death Tabor honored him by choosing him to be a recipient of the Alumnus of the Year Award.

Before graduating from Tabor, John received the call from the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church to join the teaching staff at the local Bible Institute and so in 1940, fresh from studies at Tabor, the Toews family came to Coaldale.

Coaldale was a small town in a prosperous farming area in Southern Alberta just a hundred miles east of the Rockies. One of the largest churches of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference was located in Coaldale at this time. This church had seen the need of establishing a Bible institute for the education of young people in the things of God. Students from all over Alberta and even from other provinces came to be instructed in the Scriptures and related subjects. J.A. Toews joined Benjamin W. Sawatzky, Jacob H. Quiring and John Unger in this his first venture in teaching. For six years he carried on a very effective teaching ministry at this school.

I enrolled at this Bible Institute at the age of sixteen, having dropped out of high school, as most young people did in our community. I was back for my second year when J.A. Toews joined the teaching staff. Naturally we looked the new teacher over rather carefully. Among the things that struck us were his curly hair and his laughter. In my youth, laughter was not thought of as the best expression of godliness, and perhaps that is why his friendly demeanor struck us. On one occasion that I remember vividly a student had given a less than adequate answer to a question in Church History, and Toews turned away to the blackboard and exploded in hilarious laughter.

For two years I sat under his teaching, quite impressed by his well-prepared and well-organized lectures and by the speed with which he spoke. Under his instruction the Life of Christ, Missions, and Church History came to life. He was an open-faced man. We could always tell how he felt by watching his face—

particularly obvious when the Bible school choir, which he directed, failed to produce the harmony that the notes seemed to demand.

Teaching Bible school was not a year-round occupation in the 40's, and the teachers were paid only for the months during which they taught. This meant that they had to seek gainful employment during the long summer months in order to provide for their families. Frequently local farmers would hire the teachers to work for them. Brother Toews did not shy away from hard manual labor. Blessed with a strong physical constitution, he worked with enthusiasm and endurance. As a young man I was delighted to overhear a neighbor remark to my father that Toews was a hard worker. I was proud of my teacher.

Besides teaching during the winter months and working in the fields in the summer, J.A. Toews was involved in the life of the local congregation. Since Coaldale practised the multiple ministry, we heard a great variety of sermons, and were always happy when J.A.'s turn came (we never called him J.A., nor could I ever bring myself later to address him by his initials).

Toews had a burden for evangelism and for outreach into the community. The Coaldale Church, however, was comprised almost entirely of immigrants from the Soviet Union and was struggling to adapt church practices which they had brought with them from Europe to the new land and culture. Non-ethnic Mennonites would have felt very uncomfortable in the congregation. Besides, all the services were conducted in German and that ruled out the membership of English-speaking neighbors. Toews and his colleagues at the Bible Institute, however, pushed us to become involved in a witness to the many unchurched neighbors in our own community and those surrounding Coaldale. Occasionally Toews incurred the wrath of the church leadership for his home missions thrust—something we as teenagers, who were trying to break out of established ecclesiastical traditions, thoroughly appreciated.

Toews was, however, always greatly concerned that he have the good will of his church, even though he might be quite critical of its failures and weaknesses, as he perceived these. Soon other churches in Alberta became aware of the gifts that God had given to our brother and invited him for preaching missions. In his earlier ministry Toews' gift of evangelism was recognized by the churches and many people were won for the Kingdom through his evangelistic efforts in Mennonite Brethren churches.

Having recognized that God's hand of blessing rested upon his ministry, the Church responded by affirming God's call and recommending him for ordination. After a year to teaching in Coaldale, J.A. Toews was ordained to the ministry of the gospel by his home church in Namaka. Toews valued highly the confidence the Church put in him and always held the preaching ministry in high honor. However, because of his strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and as a strong believer in the multiple ministry, he rejected all pompous clericalism.

When the Toewses came to Coaldale, World War II had broken out, and the principle of nonresistance, for which Mennonites had stood for hundreds of years, was once again put to the test. Some of the Mennonite boys of military age violated this principle; others spent a number of years in camps for conscientious objectors. Since Bible school was in session for only half a year, Toews was called to visit these camps in western Canada and to minister to the boys spiritually. His experiences during these years provided him with background for his master's thesis, which he wrote more than ten years later: *Alternative Service in Canada During World War II*.

Whereas the educational demands put on Bible school teachers in the 30's and 40's were minimal, Toews early came to the conviction that a teacher must keep on learning if he is to maintain his vigor. And, like William Longfellow, he tried to "grow a little new wood each year."

Since there was no Mennonite Brethren church in Edmonton, where the University of Alberta was located, Toews enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon. He began with summer sessions but finally decided to take a full year, receiving his Bachelor of Arts with a major in history in 1947. Since the Toewses had very limited financial resources, they lived in a small basement apartment that year and took in several student boarders to help with the expenses. By majoring in history he began to reflect one of his chief interests.

MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLE COLLEGE

Bible schools had by now been established in all the Canadian provinces in which Mennonite Brethren churches were situated. In the late 30's, however, leading men in the Conference saw the day coming when ministers and Bible teachers would need to have training beyond what was offered in the Bible institutes. This led to the establishment of the Mennonite

Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg in 1944.

Brother Abram H. Unruh got the College off the ground, so to speak, with John B. Toews assuming leadership in 1945. J.A. Toews joined the faculty in 1947. By now his family had grown to three children and two more were to be born in Winnipeg, where the family lived for twenty years, and where their five children grew up.

J.A. Toews taught a variety of courses during his long tenure at the College. He regularly taught Church History, Systematic Theology, Mennonite History and the Book of Acts. Acts was a favorite of his because it allowed him to stay in touch with Biblical studies, and also because it gave him an occasion to wrestle with the New Testament concept of the church. Of course it also provided him with the first chapter of his Church History course.

Besides teaching these and other courses, Toews served as Dean of students for a good many years. In the early days of the College that was not the most desirable office since the College had rather strict rules governing student deportment and these needed to be enforced. Dating was allowed only by special permission of the Dean of students; worldly amusements, such as theatre attendance, were prohibited; a strict dress code was observed (including a daily shave for the fellows); students had to hand in weekly reports on where they had been or what they had done in their off-hours, and so forth. This was time-consuming and often a rather thankless task. Since Toews tended to carry his heart on his sleeves, students weren't always sure the Dean of Students could keep secrets. When Henry H. Janzen, who led the College for a number of years, returned to Europe in 1956, J.A. Toews became President, and he was happy to relinquish the post of Dean of Students.

Because the College strove for respectable standards of academic work, College teachers were encouraged to pursue graduate studies. Since, however, there were no theological colleges in Winnipeg other than United College that offered graduate work in theology, Toews almost from the beginning of his ministry at MBBC, enrolled in classes in the divinity department of this College, and in 1950 received his Bachelor of Divinity degree. The thesis which he presented, entitled "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church", reflected his deepening concern for the Anabaptist heritage of the Mennonite Brethren Church which, he felt, was not sufficiently valued by Mennonite Brethren.

Since College teachers received but meagre salaries in the

50's, and since the Toewses had no other source of income, there was no thought of leaving Winnipeg with the family to do further graduate work. Besides, the College had so few qualified teachers that it could not have spared J.A. Toews very well, and sabbatical leaves were as yet a rarity. However, with his appetite whetted for further studies, Toews turned to the local University and began to take courses in a two-year Master's program at the University of Manitoba.

In 1953, when I joined the College faculty, Toews had been on faculty for six years and he was given a half-year leave to pursue his graduate work in history. He had considerable trouble with his eyes during that year but the Lord mercifully restored his vision. When he had finished his residence work and had written his thesis, he had already assumed the presidency of MBBC—a duty which he faithfully discharged from 1956 to 1963. When he left in 1967, he had served the College with great devotion, both as teacher and administrator, for a span of twenty years. Sometimes we felt he loved the College too much, for he usually took criticism of the school quite personally and, at times, tended to be overly defensive.

Since I was his colleague before, during and even after he laid down the leadership responsibility at the College, I had the opportunity to learn to know Brother Toews better than others, perhaps, particularly since I served with him in an administrative capacity for more than ten years. Although he was ten years my senior and had been my teacher, he took me fully into his confidence, and there were few things that happened in our families, at the College or in our Brotherhood which we did not share.

Toews loved to converse and dialogue with his colleagues and made it a habit of dropping in on us in our offices before we went to 8:30 classes. He tried to foster a spirit of brotherly openness in the faculty and our weekly faculty meetings could hardly be described as formal business sessions. Rather, they were forums where ideas and concerns were expressed very freely and prayer was offered. Whereas a two-hour faculty meeting every week may seem like a waste of time, these meetings fostered great unity of purpose among the faculty.

Toews made very few major decisions on his own. He always wanted to be sure he had the backing of the faculty. On several occasions the faculty encouraged him to appoint new instructors at the College who were not his choice. He freely admitted his reluctance, but then confessed that he wanted to bow to the con-

sensus of his brothers. Today some may regard that as a weakness in administrative style, but it gave the faculty a strong *esprit de corps*.

In the first twenty years of the College's history all faculty members had come, so to speak, through the ranks of the Menonite Brethren Church in Canada, and it was simply understood that they agreed with the basic teachings of that Church. Trust and confidence were valued more highly than uniformity in religious terminology. On one occasion Toews had poured out his heart in a gospel message, only to have a brother tell him that although he had preached a fine sermon, Christ was not in it. When asked why? the answer was that he had not used the word "blood" in the sermon (evidently that word had not occurred in the text from which he preached). That kind of narrowness disturbed Toews.

During the years of his Presidency, several major developments took place within our Brotherhood that strongly affected the College. The year before Toews became President, the United States brethren had launched a seminary program at Fresno, and strong pressure was brought to bear on the Canadian constituency to join in this effort. J.A. Toews opposed this move and that brought him the loss of some friends south of the 49th parallel. Upon his initiative, then, the Canadian Conference authorized a Bachelor of Divinity program at the College for students who had graduated from university. It was a disappointment to him that relatively few students availed themselves of this course of studies during the years that it was offered.

Brother Frank C. Peters, who was later to become the Academic Dean of the College, joined the faculty in 1957, with the understanding that the College would expand its offerings in the Liberal Arts area. This led initially to an affiliation with Waterloo College (now Wilfrid Laurier University) and, later, to an association with the University of Winnipeg for purposes of accreditation.

As the College grew, the academic requirements for faculty and students rose also. With the encouragement from his colleagues, Toews decided to pursue a Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota. At fifty years of age, when many persons begin to look forward to a slower pace in life, Brother Toews took up the challenge to earn a doctorate. He did this with the conviction that he could serve the College and the entire Brotherhood better with this kind of equipment. In order to meet the foreign language requirements of the history department at the Univer-

sity of Minnesota, Toews decided to brush up on his Russian, which had receded into the background through long disuse (in German he was more proficient than his professors). For an entire year Toews and I drove out to the University of Manitoba every Saturday, he to brush up on his Russian and I to study Hebrew. His Russian stood him in good stead when later, on two occasions, he was asked to visit the Soviet Union.

With summer sessions and several shorter leaves during the academic year, Toews was able to complete his residence requirements in a relatively short period of time—not an insignificant accomplishment at his age. If genius includes the capacity for concentrated work then, I suppose, one could speak of Toews as being one. Of course, he also had ample native ability. After presenting his dissertation on "Sebastian Franck: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism," Toews was awarded his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1964. By then he had resigned from the Presidency and Brother J.H. Quiring was asked to succeed him.

In a sense it was unfortunate that Toews had not been encouraged sufficiently and helped financially to earn his doctorate earlier in his teaching career, for the College would have benefited considerably more thereby. But in that respect he was, like many first generation immigrants, a "child of the times."

In 1967 Toews left the College to take up other ministries. His return to the College in 1976, after some ten years of absence, was, in a sense, a great homecoming to his Alma Mater, to which he had devoted so much of his time and energy. This last stretch of his teaching career was cut short by his sudden death in January, 1979.

TOEWS THE CHURCHMAN

Toews was first and foremost a servant of the Word. In his earlier years his sermons carried a strong evangelistic note. Many people in Canada, Paraguay and other parts of the world were saved under his preaching. Later the emphasis shifted somewhat more to the life of discipleship, sanctification and service. He preached with great fervor and occasionally his emotions overwhelmed him and he broke out in tears.

Having listened to Toews' preaching on countless occasions, I became well-versed in his style. He would regularly expound a passage of Scripture, deriving both his topic and his major heading from the text. Since he organized his material well, it was easy to listen to him, for one knew that after "firstly" there

would be a "secondly." He tried hard to bring the text from the first century into the twentieth and to apply it to the needs of the church, using illustrations, quotations, personal observations and the like, to underscore and clarify the truth.

For some ten years Toews and I spent the Easter weekend in St. Catharines, Ontario, at the annual Bible Conference in the Scott Street Mennonite Brethren Church. We would normally work through one of the Epistles in the form of expository messages, in six or seven sessions. The Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg for fifty years had a three-day Bible conference following Christmas day and here, too, Toews and I served together for at least a decade. Longer Epistles were sometimes spread over two conferences. These expositions usually appeared in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. In 1964, the editor, Henry F. Klassen, published the expositions on First Corinthians, in which Frank C. Peters had also had a part, in book form, under the title: *Das Ernste Ringen um die Reine Gemeinde*. Toews always preached well-prepared sermons, and whereas he took notes with him into the pulpit, he did not speak from a manuscript. This allowed him greater freedom and made for better audience rapport.

His classroom lectures were equally well-organized and he lectured with considerable enthusiasm. His pulpit style carried over into the classroom, and vice versa. In his more than twenty years as college teacher, scores of students sat in his classes in history, theology and Bible. Many of these are serving the Lord today in many parts of the world and carry happy memories of him as a teacher. In less than twenty years of the College's existence, it was reported that 106 had gone into missionary service, 102 into the preaching ministry, 241 into teaching, and 51 into the ministry of music—not to mention the hundreds who were active in church and Sunday school work. While Toews could not and would not claim the credit for this remarkable success, he was glad to be part of it.

But Toews was more than a preacher and teacher; he was also a conference leader. He took a keen interest in everything that went on in the life of our Brotherhood. For many years he served on the Boards of Reference and Counsel of Manitoba, of Canada, and of the General Conference. Having served with him on these boards for many years (the last ten years on the Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference), I knew of his burden for the spiritual welfare of the Church.

His great concern was that the Mennonite Brethren Church

not become a "faceless" church, reflecting only the changing moods of American Fundamentalism. It worried him to see how open our Church was to "every wind of doctrine" that happened to be blowing. Costly discipleship, separation of church and state (he cringed when he saw the American flag in Mennonite Brethren Churches), separation from the world, integrity in business, concern for the suffering and the poor, a believer's church constantly renewing itself and growing—these and other emphases were often the subject of his speeches and his pen. It was a source of great satisfaction to him when the General Conference finally adopted the present Confession of Faith, after so many drafts.

Although he had never been overly enthusiastic about a joint seminary, he accepted the decision of the Brotherhood and helped to draft the policy statement which was accepted by the General Conference in 1975 as the theological framework within which the joint Seminary was to operate.

When it came to ethical issues he was generally conservative and, perhaps by virtue of his upbringing, he tended to be a bit legalistic. But he had the courage to re-think former positions. When television made its debut, he wanted to discuss the issue in the Canadian Reference and Counsel and was very upset when Benjamin B. Janz (for whom TV was a non-issue, for it was unmistakably evil) threatened to leave the session rather than grapple with the problem. He was not afraid to tackle current issues, and had great confidence in the joint wisdom of the Brotherhood in coming to terms with them. Once a position had been established by the Conference, he found it very annoying when church leaders disregarded such policies. The complete autonomy of the local church was for him an unbiblical concept. Local churches, too, were subject to the larger Brotherhood.

He recognized, too, when it came to the adiaphora in the realm of ethics, that every generation has to think through certain issues for itself in the light of the Scriptures and may not always come out exactly at the same point as did the former. For a man of strong convictions it was not always easy to accept new positions, but to his credit it must be said that he was always open to review past policies.

With his great appreciation for our Mennonite heritage, it was only natural that he also found great interest in inter-Mennonite ventures. Also, he was very much in favor of accepting at par members of other Mennonite bodies who had been baptized (but not immersed) upon their confession of faith in

Christ. Some of our leading brethren—for whatever reason—were often critical of his participation in the Mennonite World Conference, but certainly he was an ambassador of good will among other Mennonite bodies. I recall the powerful address he gave on "The Call to Bear Witness" at the Mennonite World Conference, convening at Kitchener, Ontario, in 1957. At a previous Mennonite World Conference that met in Switzerland in 1952, he spoke on *Dienende Liebe* and stressed the need for a living faith as the prerequisite for service in the Kingdom of God. A ministry to the spiritual and physical needs of mankind, when carried out by genuine believers, was a way of uniting believers from diverse traditions, he maintained. He served with great joy on the presidium of the Mennonite World Conference and was a highly respected member of that Board, as Paul Kraybill underscored in his telegram which was read at J.A. Toews' funeral.

His concern for inter-Mennonite cooperation was evident also in the encouragement he gave to the Mennonite Brethren to join with the General Conference Church in British Columbia in the establishment of Columbia Bible Institute, at Clearbrook, B.C. He was also a strong supporter of Mennonite Central Committee, and it was a source of great satisfaction to him when his eldest daughter, Elfrieda, volunteered to serve as teacher in Nigeria under the auspices of MCC.

Repeatedly Toews was elected as conference moderator, either of the Manitoba or the Canadian Conference and, before he died, of the General Conference. He was in his second three-year term as Moderator of the General Conference when the Lord called him home. Admittedly, he was not always up on "Roberts' Rules of Order," but he wanted to be brotherly. Often, when a conference had ended, he publicly asked for forgiveness if he felt he had offended anyone in the course of the proceedings.

Toews' interest in the Mennonite Brotherhood went far beyond the boundaries of the North American scene. In 1951 the College released him for a spiritual ministry in Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil. He endured the separation from his family for a period of six months in order to preach the gospel in the Mennonite colonies, and to conduct ministers' courses, especially also in the colonies that had been established by refugees after the Second World War. Through his articles, which were published by the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, people back home were kept informed on the movement of God's Spirit in our churches under the Southern Cross. His family was glad to have him back for Christmas, 1951. He was to return to South America on

several other occasions to conduct preaching services and ministers' courses. Those of us who visited the Mennonite Brethren Churches in South America, later, learned how profound his influence had been.

Toews was always deeply interested in missions and evangelism at home and abroad. For years he was in the Mennonite Brethren General Conference's Committee which supervised city-missions, such as the one in Minneapolis. He was also in the Committee that supervised the mission to the Jews in Winnipeg. In 1950 the *Rundschau* carried his appeal for financial support of these mission efforts. However, he reminded the Brotherhood that Israel's salvation lay not in Palestine (the state of Israel had been founded in 1948), but in Christ.

His interest in evangelism never abated, and shortly before his death he urged Henry Brucks, Chairman of the Canadian Board of Evangelism, to step up the efforts to build the French-speaking Mennonite Brethren Church in Quebec.

After Toews left the College in 1967, the family spent an entire year in a fruitful ministry in Europe. In 1970 he was a member of a delegation that visited the Soviet Union. It was the fulfillment of a dream he had had for a long time. Then, shortly before his death, he had the unique privilege of returning to his native Russia once more and to preach the gospel in some of the Mennonite Churches where he had the joy of seeing a number of people come to Christ under his ministry. He also had the privilege of serving the Churches in Japan and in other parts of the world.

Upon their return from Europe in 1968, the Toewses moved to Vancouver, B.C., where John assumed the leadership of the Fraserview Mennonite Brethren Church. His teaching and preaching was much appreciated by the congregation during the three years which he served in the capacity of pastor. He found some of the things expected of a pastor by a congregation in our day and age somewhat strange, and the switch from the classroom to the pastorate was not altogether easy. It was, however, a period of spiritual growth both for the congregation and for him.

The Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference had asked Toews to write a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church and he accepted the challenge. After considerable preliminary work, the Toewses spent the year 1971-72 in Fresno, where Brother Toews could use the resources of the Hiebert Library for his research. The Seminary, of course, immediately engaged him in teaching several courses and he was only too

happy to oblige. He followed a fairly rigid schedule of research and writing during this year and by the summer of 1973 the 500-page volume was completed.

The Seminary would have been most happy to retain the services of J.A. Toews as professor of Historical Theology, but the Toewses chose rather to return to British Columbia. They purchased a house in Clearbrook and for four years Toews taught at Trinity Western College. Also, he offered several evening classes at Regent College, Vancouver. As he had done most of his life, so now also, he combined his scholarly activities with a ministry of the Word in the churches of the Fraser Valley.

Trinity Western valued Toews' contribution very highly and wanted to keep him on its faculty. However, when the call to return to Winnipeg and to the College, to which he had given the best years of his life, became stronger and stronger, the Toewses decided once more to return to the cold Winnipeg winters. As it turned out, he gave his last energies to MBBC. On his way to class one morning in January, 1979, he suffered a heart attack and went to be with the Lord.

Since some of J.A. Toews' writings are to be found in this volume, it is not necessary for me to say much about Brother Toews as writer. A quick survey of the titles in the bibliography at the back of this book will suffice to indicate what some of Toews' concerns were. Having been the editor of *The Voice* for some ten years (a theological journal published bi-monthly by the College faculty), I can here pay tribute to my former colleague for having articles in on time and in a form ready for print. Although he has left us in person, he continues to speak to us through his writings.

THE MEASURE OF THE MAN

Paul warns us not to make hasty judgments about others but to let God speak the final verdict on the day when the secrets of our hearts will be made manifest. All our evaluations of others, therefore, must be tentative. The same apostle, however, also encourages the churches to honor those who have done much for the cause of Christ. By taking the measure of the man we want to do just that. Toews, like Elijah, was a man as we are, with faults and weaknesses, and he would have been first to admit this. However, we do not think any good purpose is served by mentioning these. Rather we intend to comment briefly on Toews as theologian, as friend and as father.

Although Toews taught Systematic Theology for many years,

it was not his *forte*. He was much more a Biblical and practical theologian. Besides, he wore two hats most of his life: that of preacher and teacher. This kept him from losing himself in abstruse theological formulations which are of little profit to the church. He thought little of a theology that could not be preached.

Moreover, because of his rather vast knowledge of history, both secular and ecclesiastical, he was able to put his theology into historical perspective. His sermons, too, were dotted with references to historical events from which believers could learn. Like Santayana, Toews held that "those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." In fact, it was his considered opinion that the reason so many in our Brotherhood thought lightly of their past was their lack of knowledge of their rich heritage. It irritated him when, again and again, Mennonite Brethren voices were heard advocating that the name "Mennonite" should be dropped. Repeatedly he spoke on the topic of the identity crisis of the Mennonite Brethren and pled with them not to cut themselves off from their historical roots; for a church that did not know where it came from, he argued, did not know where it was going. The Mennonite Brethren in the Third World, he pointed out, were proud to have our name.

During most of Toews' years of ministry in the Canadian Conference there was generally a unity in the basic doctrines of faith. On more secondary questions there was great diversity. Toews had his convictions even on some of these peripheral issues, but allowed others to differ from him where the Scriptures did not speak clearly. This diversity was also reflected in the College faculty right from the beginning and throughout the years of his administration. Some brethren in the Conference taught eternal security (a doctrine Toews opposed); some were dispensationalists. Toews rejected dispensationalism, but worked together with those who interpreted the Bible in terms of that outlook. Some held to a trichotomist view of man, others were dichotomists; he stressed the unity of man. He agreed with Paul that our knowledge is "partial."

When it came to Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives, however, he was more adamant. In fact he didn't really like the word "distinctives" because it suggested that these were additions our forebears had made to the gospel. For him they were part of the gospel, as Mennonites through the centuries had understood them. His strong defense of our Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage was not always appreciated.

Toews had a high view of the Scriptures and he never

wavered in his insistence that it is the church's only infallible guide. He recognized, however, that our understanding of God's Word is not infallible, and he chided those who apparently couldn't distinguish between these two. The current controversy on inerrancy held little attraction for him. The Bible has stood the test of time and didn't need to be defended by our puny efforts. It needed to be understood and obeyed. It was the authority of the Bible for life and doctrine that was for him the real crisis of the hour.

He had considerable reservations about the current charismatic movement. Not that he couldn't rejoice when people were won for Christ and lives were transformed, but he felt uneasy about the strong emphasis on experience when it is not under the control of the Word of God. Also, he understood sanctification to be a life-long process and not something one could attain to in one grand experience of being "filled with the Spirit." One of his favorite hymns, "Higher Ground," which the choir sang at his funeral, expressed his life goal: "A higher plane than I have found, Lord plant my feet on higher ground."

His concept of the church was thoroughly Anabaptist. This meant, of course, that only believers were to be admitted to the church through confession of faith in baptism. His understanding of the priesthood of all believers meant not only that all have access to God and His Word, but also that all are called to participate in the ongoing work of redemption, in mission. For this reason, too, he advocated a multiple ministry—meaning not necessarily more paid staff, but the use of the gifts in the congregation for the upbuilding of the saints. He had a deep aversion for the clericalism which had developed in the main-line Reformation churches. As a true Anabaptist he thought of the church as a covenant community in which members covenanted with each other to follow Christ and to help each other in the Christian life. Whereas he was prepared to allow the local congregation a great measure of independence, he extended his concept of covenant community to the wider Brotherhood. This meant that individual churches should not be completely autonomous but that they were obligated also to uphold the official teachings of the Conference and to support its mission and educational ventures.

His views on the state can quickly be discerned from his sermons, his lectures, his articles and books. He recognized, of course, that the state is necessary for the preservation of order in a sinful society, but he warned against ever thinking that there

was a Christian state. Nor should the church ever identify with any political party. In fact, he cautioned the churches against speaking of the "godless East" and the "Christian West," for the church's field is the "world." In keeping with Peter's injunction to be subject to all human institutions, he too urged Christians to be law-abiding, but never to give the state blind obedience. This, of course, made participation in the military completely unacceptable to him. He argued against those who advocated dropping our peace position in the interest of evangelism by pointing out that some of the greatest days of evangelism in the church's history were the early centuries and the sixteenth (the Anabaptists), and those were the days when the church refused to participate in military affairs.

Toews was always greatly concerned about the mission of the church. He did not, however, conceive of this mission one-sidedly, as preaching the gospel only. The life of Jesus taught him that the church must also become involved in the ministry to the needy and the suffering. He did not see a tension between these two aspects of the church's mission in the apostolic period, and so he was concerned that the Mennonite Brethren Church recapture the "wholeness" of the gospel. Toews found it hard to understand how some brethren could feel more at home with the National Association of Evangelicals than with the Mennonite Central Committee. Whether very much changed in the thinking of our Brotherhood when our Board of Missions and Board of Welfare merged and became the Board of Missions and Services is hard to say, but Toews thought it was an excellent move. At least it projected symbolic significance.

In the matter of eschatology he held to all the basic teachings of the New Testament on this subject. Having said that, it should also be mentioned that he held to the finality of the New Testament, meaning that the Old Testament has to be interpreted in the light of the New and not vice versa. So much confusion in theology and in ethics stemmed, as he saw it, from putting Old and New Testament on one plane and not recognizing that God's final word was spoken in Christ. The blessed hope, as Paul calls it, was for him a very precious doctrine. This included the return of our Lord at the end of this age, the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living saints. He held to the eternal punishment of those who had rejected Christ and the eternal bliss of those who had believed in Him. However, he did not think that it mattered a whole lot what one believed about the nature of the millennium, and other questions about which the

Scriptures are not explicit.

Originality in theological investigation may not have been his greatest strength, but he brought balance and perspective to historical, theological and Biblical issues. Of the great Old Testament scholar, Harold H. Rowley, it was said that he had not flown many kites, but he had pricked many balloons. Perhaps this can be said of J.A. Toews, also, for the hallmark of scholarship is seen as much in sound judgment as in imaginative hypotheses.

Because of his strong convictions which he expressed rather clearly and sometimes a bit categorically, he also had his critics. What Frederick F. Bruce wrote about Cecil Howley, longtime editor of *The Witness*, could perhaps be said of Brother Toews, also: "He is particularly sensitive to criticism, not to reasonable criticism, but to the offensive kind which some people confuse with faithfulness to the truth, and he was treated to more than his share of the latter kind."

In his last prayer session with his colleagues at the College, Toews spoke on 1 Corinthians 13, stressing the abiding qualities of the Christian life: faith, hope and love. These three, he went on to say, represented in a sense his own spiritual pilgrimage. In his earlier years he had thought "faith" was the most important (i.e., faith in the sense of "doctrine"). Later, "hope" became more important to him. And now, in his last years, "love" seemed to tower above all else.

Those who knew him well can testify to the fact that love was not lacking even in his earlier years. Toews had a capacity for friendship. He loved people and was concerned that others should love him. One incident—a magnificent display of collegiality—will always remain in my memory. I was doing a year of graduate work in Chicago, but was asked to come home to the College for registration (since I was Registrar at the time). Because of mechanical troubles, my flight was delayed and I did not arrive in Winnipeg until 2:00 a.m. And who should be there to meet me at that unearthly hour but J.A. Toews! We did not always see eye to eye during the many years that we worked side by side for the cause of the Kingdom, and I was deeply moved when I received a letter from him several years after he had left the College in which he wrote: "Brother Ewert, there is no one with whom I agree as much as you." It was the voice of friendship.

Toews had a happy home-life and he drew great strength from his family. His wife, Nettie, was a faithful worker with him

for the cause of the Kingdom. The motto which Max Warren, the famous British missiologist, and his wife took for their motto might best describe the relationship of John and Nettie Toews: "The joy of going through life hand in hand with the comrade of one's choice, sharing one another's burdens, stimulating one another's courage, doubling one another's laurels, and easing one another's pain."

Five healthy and gifted children were born to them—three daughters and two sons. For a time five of the faculty members at the College had families of five children each, and people would say jokingly that one had to have five in order to teach at the College. The Toews children all chose the teaching profession (David is in graduate school at the moment preparing to teach). All the children are married: Elfrieda to Wayne Nafziger, Manhattan, Kansas; Wilma to Barry Kennedy, Vancouver, B.C.; John to Eleanor Wall, Seattle, Washington; David to Kathy Waltner, Guelph, Ontario; and Irene to Bill Maier, Kelowna, B.C.

The complaint of John Newton that his father loved him but did not wish his son to know it, can hardly be made about J.A. Toews. He loved his children and thought highly of them. Like many other parents, the Toewses were not spared the pains of seeing their children struggle for independence. And those who had teenagers in the sixties know something of the storm and stress of that decade, when all traditions were put in question. It is sometimes said that nothing puts one's theology to the test as do one's own children. This would probably have to be said of J.A. Toews, too. Not that he weakened in his convictions but, as his son, John, expressed it at his father's funeral, there was a mellowing process which led him to distinguish more clearly between the things that really mattered in life and those which were of lesser significance.

The Toewses never had many earthly possessions. Since the family had lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution, Toews knew how ephemeral the things of this earth can be. Besides, his conscience had been sensitized by years of poverty after the family came to Canada. Quite naturally, then, he abhorred waste, and he was very critical of Conference boards that spent the gifts of God's people unwisely. More than once I heard him quote Jonathan Goforth of China, who said to his wife when they lost all their personal belongings in a fire, "But my dear, they are just 'things'." In a sermon preached at a youth conference in Yarrow, B.C. in 1950, he warned the young people against choosing the

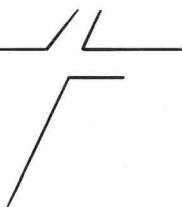
way of materialism and the loss of idealism and self-sacrificing service. The things of the Spirit and of the mind were of much greater importance to him than earthly possessions. Music lessons for the children and tuition for schooling came before expensive clothes, houses and cars.

In a message at the annual Bible conference in Winnipeg in 1961 when he, Frank C. Peters and I worked through Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, he quoted with approval the observation of P.M. Friesen, famous Mennonite historian, that "the greatness of a man is measured by his loyalty to the ideas which he pursues, according to his inner conviction." By that standard I think we will agree that J.A. Toews was great. He, of course, would be the first to respond with Paul's confession: "By the grace of God I am what I am."

On January 12, 1979, while preparing to leave for a day of teaching at the college he suffered a heart attack. The next day the Lord took him home, at 66 years of age. We miss him greatly; but we join in the words of the beatitude sung by the College Choir at his funeral in Winnipeg: "How Blessed Are They Who Serve the Lord."

Part One

The Nature and Life of the Church



BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE NURTURE OF THE CHURCH *

(I Corinthians 3:10-23)

A careful reading of the Scriptures is the best key to an understanding of the Word of God. Frequently we do not pay attention to this fact. We should read the Word of God with much more caution, alertness and care so that we might understand what God is saying to us.

Time and again, in the apostle Paul's description of Christian life and service, one image flows into another. Therefore it is not wise, as is sometimes done, to extract one image and make of it the one and absolute presentation of spiritual truth. In I Corinthians 3:9 Paul speaks of planting and building. He reaches into real life in an unconstrained manner in order to render divine truths vital for us and uses various images to illuminate the nature of service.

Our text deals with the diligent nurture of the church. That is not child's play. In the Old Covenant the building of the temple was a high and holy task and responsibility. Not every man was called nor worthy to build the temple. Even David was declared unworthy to build the temple, and that by God Himself, because he had spilt too much blood.

Paul warns especially the teachers and workers in the church not to ruin the temple of God. It is possible, if one is not called and is unskilled, to ruin the structure. Who can count all the ruined spiritual temples which are a result of errors committed by workers and master builders who were neither skilled nor called? Repeatedly, we find illustrations of this truth in history, a truth which is so frequently set before us. In our time also, the nurture of the church confronts the teachers and leaders of the church with great spiritual challenges. Earnest wrestling, by

* *Das Ernste Ringen um die Reine Gemeinde: Betrachtungen ueber den Ersten Brief an die Gemeinde zu Korinth* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1964), pp. 64-78. Translated by Hugo Jantz.

means of the adequate armor which God grants to us in his Word, is required in order to carry out this work properly.

In the building up of the church we are exposed to so many different influences which can have a determining effect upon our work. There is, for example, a democratic mindset which would determine our church polity. We can hardly resist such impressions and influences because they impinge upon us on all sides and call for decisive action. Consequently some would transform the church into a small democracy. Furthermore, a business approach threatens to give direction to the work of the church. There are those who would very much like to view and evaluate the matter of giving from the vantage point of the business world. As a result, we often lose the essence of a biblical church.

In this text, Paul shows how the church can be built up in a fitting manner. He speaks about the diligent nurture of the church and gives us the guiding principles for it.

A CONTINUING NURTURE OF THE CHURCH UPON THE FOUNDATIONS ALREADY LAID

According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (vv. 10, 11).

Here we have the exhortation to continue building upon the foundation which was at one time laid down by the apostle Paul. He challenges the teachers and workers to pursue the task begun earlier. This imperative, to continue building upon the foundation already laid, implies certain presuppositions.

First, when we speak of continuing to build up the church, it is clear that the foundation has already been laid. There was no doubt that the apostle Paul had laid the foundation correctly through his ministry. And now the teachers in Corinth were to take heed how they in fact continued to build the church, the New Testament temple. Here Paul is telling us that the gospel had been preached in the right manner in Corinth. Earlier Paul had indicated how he had preached the gospel to them: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The people in Corinth had heard a healing, saving gospel, not a human philosophy. That is a part of the foundation in the building of the church; without it a healthy church life

cannot be nurtured. There are churches where a clear, saving gospel was not preached at the outset and where for that reason no proper building up of the church can take place.

The people in Corinth had undergone a genuine experience, and that is a part of the laying of the foundation. In spite of a proper preaching of the gospel, it is possible not to have an authentic experience of salvation. We do not find that Paul had doubts about the conversion of the Corinthians, although he rebuked them for their many shortcomings and moral weaknesses. For Paul one thing was clear: God had begun a good work in these people. In chapter 6:11 Paul states, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." Let us notice that Paul did not doubt the experience of salvation of these people. A genuine beginning with converted people had taken place. That is basic. . . .

Otto Funcke says in one of his books: "We often sing 'Onward Go, Onward Go, Zion, Onward Go In Light', but most have never properly begun to go onward." What did he wish to say? There was a preaching of sanctification and betterment of life to such who had not yet experienced regeneration and conversion. In many instances it is necessary, therefore, to investigate the beginning.

When Paul came to Ephesus he had to take a look at the beginnings of the church. There the foundation had not been properly laid. That had happened, not because of ill-will, but because of a lack of knowledge. Apollos had spoken only about the baptism of John in Ephesus. When Paul arrived there he found disciples who, according to his impression, had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Therefore he asked them: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They did not know that the Holy Spirit existed.

Let us take note: Where there is no evidence of new life, we have to begin at the bottom—there the foundation must be properly laid, as Paul laid it in Ephesus.

A second consideration is that the foundation must be the right one.

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Whether it is for personal salvation or for the building up of the church, there is no other foundation but Jesus Christ. In that regard Paul agrees with Peter, who asserts: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must

be saved" (Acts 4:12). To the Galatians, who had accepted Christ as their foundation and then attempted to lay a second foundation alongside Christ, Paul says: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). There is no other true foundation outside of Christ.

Christ is not a milestone which we can simply pass by on the way to the next, for then we have lost sight of the first and then we have left Christ behind us. That is the error of many sects and heretical teachings.

The Muslims have not excluded Christ. They allow Christ to stand as a milestone, but later set up another milestone—Mohammed.

The Mormons have a similar view of the cornerstone, Christ. They allow him to stand, but a second revelation is added — Joseph Smith's.

Paul wants to tell us here that Christ is the only foundation, and no second one may be laid. God tolerates no freemasonry, which tries to erect another foundation beside this one.

The danger in Corinth had to do with the attempt to lay a second foundation based on the personalities of the apostles named in the text. No longer was Christ alone valid; rather, it was now being said: "I belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas." The building-stones, which were designed to be cornerstones on the foundation, were being used as foundation-stones.

That must not happen in the life of the church of Jesus Christ. The entire church structure must stand on this foundation. Christ and his Word are the only authority for spiritual life and growth. No works of righteousness, no worldly wisdom, no humanism may be accepted as a substitute foundation. We may not build even on our religious experience. The foundation is and remains Jesus Christ. Whoever builds otherwise, builds upon sand.

This text was, as many readers know, the motto of Menno Simons: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He built on this foundation; he allowed no other foundation to take its place. And he built a church which has prevailed through the centuries. He laid the proper foundation, because he built up the church on Jesus Christ and his Word. Not the word of the city council of Zurich, not the word of the princes of Germany, but the Word of Christ alone had validity for him. On the front of the new structure at the Bible College in Winnipeg we have placed the verse: "Other

foundation can no man lay than that is laid, Jesus Christ." That is the stance of our school. All the building that we engage in, including the areas of theology and Christian education, shall stand and remain on this foundation.

There is, however, a third prerequisite that is basic to this imperative to continue the building process. The foundation which is laid demands continued building. Paul says: "According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it." Paul's work in Corinth and its results did not constitute a completed structure, but merely a solid foundation upon which the nurture of the life of the church should continue. That should be noted, for it tells us something about the work which Paul did there and about the work we do today when a new church is begun.

This tells us that evangelization is not a conclusive effort; rather it is the laying of the foundation, it is planting. After the planting comes the watering, if the plant is not to suffer and to die. As the newborn infant needs nurture, so also young believers require it. Labor is required in the building up of the church. This also tells us that conversion is not the end of the salvation experience; conversion is the beginning of that experience.

The Corinthians had found and received Christ as the foundation and probably often gloried in this foundation. There was now the danger that they would remain with this initial experience, that they would remain children, that they would not grow to full stature in Christ. Paul had to tell them: "You are still carnal, you are still childish." They did not want to outgrow the age of childhood and accept the responsibility for the building of the church. That was a weakness in the church at Corinth.

There are many children of God who want to remain with the beginning experiences. . . . We all have high regard for the Salvation Army, which is primarily involved in planting. Members of the Salvation Army attempt to lay a foundation where there is none. But those who are satisfied with simply laying the foundation are severely handicapped. The writer to the Hebrews challenges the believers: "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation" (Hebrews 6:1a). We also need to tell ourselves that once the foundation has been laid, the Word requires that we continue to build upon this foundation and erect a God-approved structure.

A CAREFUL NURTURE REQUIRES A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE VARIOUS BUILDING MATERIALS

Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. . . . (v. 12).

The building materials must be understood here as the substance of the Christian teaching ministry. They represent the results of Christian teaching activity and the manner in which these are to be evaluated.

Note first that the essence of the evaluation is not the usefulness of the building materials. All six kinds of material that are named here are useful in the construction of houses in the Orient—gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. Certainly one would use more wood than gold, silver and precious stones in the building of houses. Even dry stems of grass were often used for covering houses in the absence of better building materials. Also, the essence of the evaluation is not to identify the six kinds of building materials. Many of us have heard astonishing sermons about the six kinds of building materials. That is hardly the point here!

If we read this verse carefully in the light of the verses that follow, we notice that when tested the building materials are divided into two classes—one which relates to value and the other to durability. In the first instance, less costly and more costly building materials are contrasted. It is clear that gold, silver and precious stones are costly materials. That tells us that the work in the kingdom of God cannot be measured by quantity. We know that wood, hay and stubble can be found in large quantities and are measured by volume and weight. In the kingdom of God the value of our work is not measured by quantity. How often size and numbers are emphasized in our country!

We know that gold, silver, and precious stones cannot be found in large quantities. They are difficult to discover and difficult to acquire. I recall the late Brother John F. Harms described a ministry that was performed in the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Old Colony of South Russia a few years after its founding. Brother Harms described the ministry as mediocre. Why so? Because the ministering brother had very loose ethical standards. Many brothers followed his example and began to smoke, and that resulted in severe church discipline. His ministry did not stand the test of fire. There is inferior and there is superior ministry in the service of the Lord.

There is a second test which is of even greater significance, however. It tests perishability or inflammability. We note that the two classes of building materials are divided into two groups through the test of fire. The one group endures the fire, the other does not. Our ministry, our service, must endure the test of fire. Eventually we will have to endure the fire of judgment, but also in this life our ministry and service must pass the test of fire. There is the test of history—many things that seem very valuable today will seem very inferior in ten years in the light of history. The ravages of time also reveal the weaknesses of structures. In Matthew 7 we find not a test of fire but the test of water. When the winds blew and the rains descended and the floods rose, the structure collapsed. So also our life's ministry must stand the tests and judgments of history. The work of many goes up in flames already in this life. For example, Mussolini and other great men had seemingly done great things for their people. But their life's work did not endure and fell into ruin after their own decline. Thus the accomplishment of many is consumed; it does not stand the test of time and of history. In retrospect we can look upon the ministry of many brothers and sisters and must say that it did not endure the test of history.

In this life there is yet another test, and that is the trial by the fire of the Word of God. Our service must be brought under this searchlight again and again. We do not have to wait until that great day in order to find out what kind of ministry ours is.

Our God is a consuming fire, the Word tells us. Christ's eyes are as a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14). The Holy Spirit reveals himself as a Spirit who baptizes with fire. This is the God with whom we deal in the Word, and he tests our ministry by fire already in this life. Our life's work must be shown to be genuine by this test of fire.

A CAREFUL NURTURE IN THE CHURCH REQUIRES A DEFINITE EXPECTATION OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

Each man's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (vv. 13-15).

For the servant of Christ the judgment seat of Christ stands

at the end of the way. An awareness of the judgment at the end of time, knowing about this test of building materials, must be a powerful motivation to build carefully. During my graduate studies I knew that I would have to submit to a comprehensive examination at the end. I had to submit to many exams in my studies, but another exam was ahead which was not bound to any one of the courses taken, and which would test my entire education. Thus there comes a day at the end of life when the whole of our service, not just phases of it, will be placed under the light of God's righteousness and holiness.

What is the essence of the test of building materials in the final judgment? Paul says: "for the day of judgment will authenticate it, because it reveals itself as fire." The fire consumes all that is impure and inferior; it will also reveal that which has permanent value. We speak here not of purgatory, which concept the Catholics have derived from this verse, nor do we speak here of a refining fire; rather this is a fire that destroys and reveals. That which does not stand the test will be destroyed, but the other material, the precious material, emerges from the fire in the fulness of shining glory. Gold and silver and precious stones are not destroyed during the test, but rather are authenticated as genuine building material in the test.

The use of the right building material can bring the comforting expectation that one's life's work will remain. "If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward" (v. 14). After faithful ministry follows reward, and the Master will determine the reward according to the quality of the work done. It is not the distance we have run in the race, not the number of sermons we have preached, nor the number of services we have attended, but rather our motivation and faithfulness in the Lord's work, which will be the standard by which the reward will be determined. Much work which was done behind the scenes with great effort and in humility will then be revealed. That which is built in an ostentatious manner here upon earth is often overrated by man and turns out to be wood, hay and stubble. What is done in secret, with love and dedication, God will one day reward. This is a comforting expectation in view of the conditions of our time. Paul asserts a fact; he does not say "maybe" but in faith points to a reality that exists for the believer.

The use of the wrong building material, however, brings the tragic expectation that one's life's work will be lost: "If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself

will be saved, but only as through fire" (v. 15). Saved as a brand from the fire! It is possible that one's entire life's work will go up in flames. What a bitter experience it will be on that day, when everything that we counted of value turns out to be without worth for God and his kingdom and is burned! Many workers have borne the heavy burden of dread at the end of their lives that perhaps they have labored in vain. We do well to judge and test ourselves in this life. Then God can still make something of our labor that will survive the test of fire.

We read, however, that he whose life's work is burned, is himself saved: "he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." We need to note that this poor wretch, who loses everything, had the right foundation at one time: "Now if anyone builds on this foundation. . . ." We are not speaking of those who lost the foundation. This word does not speak of an unconditional security of those who once had an experience of salvation. That teaching is not implied here. What we have here is the loss of the life's work of those who were genuinely converted and have remained in the faith. But they did not build properly, they did not allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit; perhaps in building the church they allowed themselves to be determined by man's worldly wisdom.

A CAREFUL NURTURE IN THE CHURCH REQUIRES A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THREATENING DANGERS

Many things can be ruined through lack of understanding. We have here an earnest warning directed to shepherds and teachers not to bring ruin to the church:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are (v. 16-17).

Among the Jews the profanation of the temple was one of the greatest sins. This is also one of the greatest sins in the building of the New Testament temple, the church. In this text I detect two dangers in building the church. One of these is not to recognize the importance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the church, among ministers as well as among other members, there is often a lack of awareness of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As a

New Testament church and as those who carry on the teaching ministry in the church, we must have the awareness that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the early church some members lost this awareness. Ananias and Sapphira did not realize that the Holy Spirit works and reveals himself in the church. When Ananias lied before Peter, the apostle said to him: "You have lied not to men but to God. . . . Why was it that Satan so possessed your mind that you lied to the Holy Spirit?" God brought them to ruin, because they had brought the temple of God to ruin. That is why judgment came over these people at that time. Sin against the teaching ministers and against the church is sin against God and the Holy Spirit. This awareness of responsibility for the temple of God is often lacking among members of our church.

In concerns regarding the church the main question should always be: Is the way we have chosen, is the task we wish to discharge, ordered by the Holy Spirit? That must always be our question—not what is most practical, or excellent, or what will bring the best results. Is our action in harmony with the will of God?

In the church at Antioch there was an awareness of the temple of God and there the Spirit of God could speak. We read of this church: "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said. . ." (Acts 13:2). The Holy Spirit could reveal himself in that church.

At the time of the first conference in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit was able to reveal himself to the brethren, he was able to make his will known. Although there were many differences of opinion and much discussion, they could finally say: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . . ." They had the awareness that the Holy Spirit was in their brotherhood and that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit. May God give us who are teachers, shepherds and members of the church this awareness!

Another danger is that of overestimating worldly wisdom in the church. To illuminate this danger one could draw upon the entire history of the Christian church. Why is it that people have built so defectively again and again? On the one hand, they have not allowed the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to be determining factors. On the other hand, people have put worldly wisdom on the throne. The natural human intellect has been lifted into the saddle and given free rein. The history of the state churches and many others churches would substantiate this assertion. To a

large extent such churches are the product of worldly wisdom and ecclesiastical politics.

Overestimating worldly wisdom springs largely from a lack of humility. People are impressed with their own wisdom and deceive themselves. The apostle Paul challenges us with these words: "If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (v. 18). That is a call to genuine humility, which leads us to be submissive and to allow ourselves to be led by God.

The boasting by leaders of factions, the boasting by those who have gifts of the Spirit, is a result of worldly wisdom. That is how the sins of life outside of Christ are revealed in the church in new garb. Some, coming from the secular university, have absorbed such ideas their entire lives and then desire to work in the church from that base. Others have spent a lifetime in business and think in those terms, and then want to judge all things in the church from that standpoint. Thus it is with other professions and vocations: people tend to judge church matters from their own perspective. That is the wisdom of this world. That wisdom has its place but it must not have a decisive role in the church. There we need godly wisdom, which God reveals to us in his Word.

The Word of God condemns the overestimation of secular wisdom. Paul is not only expressing a personal opinion. He quotes two passages from the Old Testament. One of these, Job 5:12, 13, reads: "He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. He takes the wise in their own craftiness; and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end." With these words Paul underscores the truth that worldly wisdom does not endure; it is finally caught in a deadend street from which there is no escape. Then it becomes apparent that even the intelligent thinker is very short-sighted, and that he should ask the Lord for wisdom.

On the sea voyage to Rome Paul had to experience that the centurion, who was responsible for the prisoners, trusted the captain and owner of the ship rather than Paul. Paul had light about the future course of the ship, but he was not heeded. And then the wise were put to shame in their wisdom. How often we have experienced that!

Paul also quotes Psalm 94:11: "The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath." The Lord looks upon this worldly wisdom, which seems so logical and so reasonable, and declares it vain. "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the

children of men, to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God" (Ps. 14:2). Paul says: "So let no one boast of men" (I Cor. 3:21a).

A CAREFUL NURTURE OF THE CHURCH REQUIRES AN ENLARGED COMPREHENSION OF OUR HIGH CALLING

Paul here shows us the glorious riches to which we are called:

For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours (vv. 21a, 22).

Here we have the great spiritual wealth of our calling. What belongs to us as believers, as the church? Ours are all the servants of the church, not just Paul, or Cephas or Apollos. Each has significance for us. Each has something to say, each has contributed to our spiritual lives. The Corinthians were robbing themselves in this regard through their factionalism. They became impoverished because they wanted to get the whole truth from one man. God gives us the whole truth through various servants of his, never through one alone, so that we "may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18, 19). We are often so carnal in our estimation and judgment of church workers that we accept the truth only from some.

We notice this tendency at the College among some of our students. Sometimes they want to take all their courses from one professor. The more mature ones, however, recognize that they can learn from everyone. Everyone has something to contribute toward better preparation for service. That is also how it is with the various preachers in the church—many church members want to hear the truth from only one preacher. "No," says Paul, "all teachers are yours." He says further that the world also belongs to us. The word used here in the original text is "cosmos", the creation. The reference is not to the sinful world of which John speaks and which we are not to love, but rather the world that was created by the hand of God, that belongs to us. Only a few of us have title to a particular parcel of land, but all of us have title to the cosmos. The world is yours to use, but

not abuse; it is yours for service in order to glorify the Lord with the resources of the world. All is yours!

Paul says further: "Life and death are yours!" That can be understood only in spiritual terms, in the light of the resurrection hope. Paul could write in his letter to the Philippians: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He did not know which he should choose. For the believer, both are of great worth. Life affords opportunity for service, death affords eternal fellowship with Christ. The present and the future belong to us; that is also a part of our possession. Let us note that the past is excluded; it is so dark, there are many failures in the past. The present is ours still; in the present we can build carefully.

You may sorrow today about the fact that you have been building in a defective manner. Don't become mired down in that position, for the present and the future belong to you. Let us use the present and the future for the glory of God and to build up the church with care.

Finally, Paul makes us aware of the sovereign Lordship of Christ to which we are called: "You are Christ's" (v. 23). Christ does not belong to us, nor does he belong to any one faction. From time to time Christ has been designated as belonging to a faction. In the division of the world into East and West it would appear that Christ belongs to the western world. No! No! Christ belongs to no one part of the world. "You are Christ's." In the exercise of spiritual gifts, in the building up of the church, we need always to guard the profound awareness that we belong to Christ. We are not our own; we were bought with a price; we belong to Christ. It is of great significance in the building up of the church that we are able to say: The teachers in the church and all the individual members all belong to Christ.

The church does not belong to the pastor. At times a pastor will speak of "my church." No, the church belongs to no leader and to no pastor; the church belongs to Christ. The teachers also do not belong to the church; rather, they are servants of the church for the sake of Christ. However, the church is not lord of the teachers. Christ is Lord of the church, Christ is the mediator between God and man; but Christ is God's.

In the word of the apostle we have a pair of spiritual scales to weigh our service. Are we willing, today, to lay our life's work upon the scales in order to discover how God judges our work? Yes, we can do it today, in the light of the Word. Belshazer, when his life's work was viewed, had to hear the words: "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." Will

that be the final evaluation of our life's work?

We are very thankful to the Lord for the proper foundation which has been laid in our Brotherhood, in the one instance some 400 years ago, and again some 100 years ago. But now the results depend upon how we continue to build upon this foundation: "Let each man take care how he builds upon it."

May God help us to build aright in the light of the coming Day, so that our life's work will endure the test of fire.

PAUL AS A MODEL TEACHER FOR THE CHURCH *

The apostle Paul is an outstanding model for us in all areas of kingdom work. He represents the spirit-endued preacher, the successful evangelist, the tireless missionary, the down-to-earth pastor, the faithful and consistent man of prayer, as well as a *teacher* by the grace of God. Despite the fact that Paul never taught in a theological institution, all of his service in God's kingdom is closely linked to the teaching ministry. His recorded messages (in the Book of Acts) are model sermons and his letters to the churches are, in large measure, of an instructional nature. As indicated in the pastoral letters (2 Tim. 2:2), Paul was intent on strengthening the teaching ministry in the church. He was deeply conscious of the fact that, at root, the Great Commission was a command to teach, and that sound instruction is essential for a valid salvation experience and the consequent personal and communal life of faith.

Such a teaching ministry places demands on the church worker. This task is accompanied by serious tests and difficult trials. The study of this great apostle as a model can provide motivation and encouragement for the teacher in the church. On the basis of Acts 20 and some texts in the Pastoral Letters, I wish to draw attention to Paul's personal example as well as his practical principles for the practice of this ministry.

HIS PERSONAL EXAMPLE

Paul is a model for the teacher in the church in *his unswerving faithfulness to principles*. In the teaching ministry, fidelity to one's convictions is of great importance. It is not easy for a person to hold firmly to his principles in the face of attacks and false accusations and even persecution. Paul remained true to his con-

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victions of faith (Acts 20:19; 2 Tim. 1:8-14). Neither the threats of the world nor the carnal attitude of some brethren could impel him to make any compromises. This cannot be said of all the leaders of the Apostolic period. Galatians 2:11-15 describes the apostle Peter's lapse through which even Barnabas was induced to compromise his convictions. When messengers from James arrived in Antioch, Peter withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentile Christians because he feared the Jewish Christians. Thereby he violated a principle which he had earlier supported (Acts 11:1-18). Many teachers of the truth have begun to vacillate and have fallen because of the fear of man or the desire to please people. Our day calls for those who, like Luther, are prepared to say, "Here I stand, I can do no other."

Paul is also a model for the church worker in *the candid proclamation of the whole truth*. As he reflected on his ministry in Ephesus, Paul was able humbly to affirm, "You know that I did not hold back anything that would be of help to you as I preached and taught in public and in your homes" (Acts 20:20). The one who teaches in the congregation may not withhold any truth. He is made responsible by God to announce the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:27). The teacher may never forget the Master's concluding word: "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The teacher may not neglect any truth. Conversion, sanctification, responsibility for missions—these must all be clearly taught. Even unpopular truths such as the need for prayer and biblical nonresistance may not be held in reserve or be diminished or belittled. Paul characterized the end of the age as a time when "people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own desires and will accumulate for themselves more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear" (2 Tim. 4:3). We notice this tendency in our day. Instruction is being withheld because it does not seem relevant to the teacher himself, though it may be necessary and helpful for the church. May God give us more fearless witnesses to the whole truth.

Paul's example is also an incentive for *the joyful exercise of the divinely-appointed ministry*. Paul maintained a biblical optimism even under the most trying circumstances. His true greatness becomes apparent in his words, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). In spite of the fact that he had to endure much suffering in his

ministry, he never murmured nor complained about the deprivation and difficulty experienced in his service. We find no evidence that he discouraged his co-workers with a litany of complaints. On the contrary, he encouraged them and motivated them to greater devotion and faithfulness. Even the envy and the rivalry of other preachers could not rob him of his joy (Phil. 1:15-18). What a gift of grace it is when a person remains effective and happy to the end of his ministry in spite of all the trying circumstances and experiences! That corresponds to Luke's closing descriptions of Paul's ministry in the Book of Acts: "He preached about the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking with all boldness and freedom" (28:31). How many church workers have grown embittered through the disappointments and difficult experiences in the ministry and have thereby become ineffective in his service! The contagious enthusiasm of the teacher is frequently as important for the reception of the truth as his logical and clear presentation. Let us learn from Paul in this regard.

Paul is, further, an example in church ministry in *his unassailable purity of motive*. The motive force in his work was the love of Christ. He could honestly say, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" (Acts 20:33). Paul was grateful for financial support (see Phil. 4), but this did not shape or motivate his service. Paul never regarded people, especially Christians, as means to an end. He never used his influence for selfish ends. He could say, "For I seek not what is yours, but you" (II Cor. 12:14). The teaching ministry in the congregation can result in blessings only if the motives for service are pure and transparent.

We observe, further, some guiding principles which Paul recommends, under the Spirit's guidance, to the teachers in the church.

HIS PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

The first practical principle is that *one deliberately avoid foolish questions*. It is striking to note how often the apostle Paul challenges his younger co-workers to avoid foolish and time-consuming questions. He speaks of "myths and endless genealogies" (I Tim. 1:4), of those who have "a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words" (I Tim. 6:4), and of the "the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (I Tim. 6:20; cf. II Tim. 2:14, 16-18, 23; Titus 1:11,

14, 3:9). Such questions rob the teacher of valuable time, deflect attention from the central redemptive truths and promote ungodliness rather than wholesomeness. Unspiritual people within the church delight in occupying themselves with such questions. People speculate and philosophize about such matters as the cause of Satan's fall and the meaning of 666, the number of the beast (Rev. 13). Satan's intention is to sidetrack the teacher so that his witness becomes worthless and powerless. Our high calling demands that we carefully avoid and eliminate from our teaching anything which does not contribute to the salvation of the lost and the edification of the church.

A second principle is that *one be constantly occupied with sound teaching*. Preoccupation with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1) is indispensable for an effective ministry. Paul exhorts, "Attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress" (I Tim. 4:13, 15). The sound doctrine is not limited to doctrinal formulations but includes instruction in holy living: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). The teacher in the church has not fulfilled his obligation if he has only called for and brought about a better understanding of scriptural truth in the membership. He must also instruct in obedience, train in godliness and stimulate members for service. All theology shall make hearers into doers of the Word.

In his admonition to Timothy, Paul also emphasizes the need for an *impartial care for all segments of the congregation*. It happens all too readily in church work that one group receives much time and attention while another is overlooked or neglected. In his letters, Paul pays attention to all segments of the fellowship and calls on Timothy to do likewise (I Tim. 5, 6). The old and young, brothers and sisters, require exhortation and instruction. Widows are not to be neglected, slaves are to be shown their obligation and Timothy is not to shrink from reminding the wealthy of their responsibilities. The church is a unity and therefore no group should be neglected.

One receives the impression, when analyzing congregational life in our country, that many church workers give most of their time and attention to the youth for the sake of popularity. Such a tendency will inevitably lead to unhealthy phenomena in church life.

A final, essential principle for the teacher is that he *strive*

earnestly toward greater maturity in his life and service (I Tim. 6:11-12, 4:13-16). The worker should never forget that he is and should remain one who is "becoming" in his ministry. Only the person who continues to learn can teach appropriately and effectively. The worker should be characterized by continuous spiritual growth and development of knowledge and teaching skills. Paul constantly aspired to greater maturity in life and service. Writing to the Philippians, he said, "Not that I have already attained or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own. . ." (3:12). Calvin once observed: "the only perfection in this world consists of the striving after perfection."

May God give those of us who have a ministry to people the grace never to cease ministering to ourselves. Paul's example can inspire us to carry out our teaching ministry in the church in an appropriate manner, in the right spirit and for the glory of God.

THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT *

Among the urgent issues arising from the diverse ecclesiastical and theological movements of the twentieth century is the question of the nature of the church. Even the World Council of Churches has undertaken a searching study of this question (Amsterdam: 1948). It is not a simple matter for the church of our day to grasp the New Testament conception of the church clearly and to realize it in practise. Commercial and at times even political influences have tended to shape our conception of the membership, organization, administration and task of the church. The strange emphasis upon the autonomy of the local church is a phenomenon in evangelical circles which is rooted in the separatistic movements of the Reformation. In North America certain tendencies deriving from our democratic conception of the state have strongly influenced the development of this concept of the autonomy of the local church. As is the case with all biblical concepts and truths, it is difficult to retain the biblical ideal and biblical balance in respect to our conception of the church.

We find extreme deviations from the New Testament ideal on the one hand in Roman Catholic hierarchy and, on the other, in interdenominational anarchy. In the former deviation we see a developed absolutism in which the individual member, as also the individual congregation, is of little account. In the latter deviation, we see a pronounced individualism wherein the individual member insists upon complete self-determination and wherein the local church regards its autonomy as absolute. In the case of the evangelical churches which belong to the left wing of the Protestant movements, the hazards are more obviously linked to the latter situation.

* *The Voice* 6 (July-August 1975): 1-4. Translated by Herbert Giesbrecht.

A careful study of the New Testament churches reveals that the sharp delimitation of the local church in respect to such matters as administration, doctrine and social service is really foreign to the apostles. The apostles did not view the congregations of the believers as independent and isolated entities which made only occasional contact with other congregations even though they necessarily assembled at specific places. The picture of the apostolic church which emerges is, instead, one of a large brotherhood wherein individual groups and congregations demonstrate wide interdependence and wherein all churches manifest a readiness to be guided by a central spiritual leadership.

It is to be noted in the New Testament representation of the church, that the notion of the kingdom of God is never separated from the concept of the church. Among the writers of the New Testament the "kingdom" concept always lies in the background of their thinking and constitutes the larger framework for their understanding of the church.

This connection is evident not only in the General Epistles but also in the Pauline Epistles. Paul perceived an organic connection among the individual members of a local congregation as well as among the individual churches of a large mission area. It was his constant and earnest desire to maintain "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) also within the larger realm of the collective brotherhood and fellowship, and to comprehend the full counsel of God together with "all the saints." An emphasis upon the absolute autonomy of the local church in a Darbyistic and, to some degree, also baptistic sense, as it is being promoted by certain brethren in our own church at present, would have thrust the apostolic churches into a destructive subjectivism. The creation of the New Testament canon, consisting of letters and books addressed to individual churches and persons, is striking evidence of the spirit of unity existing among the churches of the first century. The local churches acknowledged as God's Word what the Lord had revealed to other local churches by means of his servants.

In this brief and by no means exhaustive treatment I wish to call attention to several areas in which the apostles, in both their teaching and practise, strongly curtail the autonomy of the local church and grant it only relative significance.

IN RESPECT TO POLITY

Although we must distinguish, in some instances, between

apostolic practise, which is already largely concerned with the founding of mission churches, and the organization and administration of existing churches, we do have examples in the New Testament which are pertinent to our own situation.

Acts 8 describes the evangelization of the city of Samaria by the evangelist Philip. Without receiving an invitation from Philip, the apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria in order to strengthen and fortify the work which had been initiated there. Evidently Philip did not regard this action as in any sense an encroachment upon his ministry or authority.

In chapter eleven of the Book of Acts we have the account of the establishment of the Church at Antioch. When this event was reported to the Church at Jerusalem (see chap. 11:22), the latter commissioned Barnabas to investigate and to encourage the believers in Antioch. What may surprise us equally as much is that Barnabas, without securing permission from this large congregation, called Saul of Tarsus to minister in the congregation as co-worker and teacher. As a divinely-endued spiritual leader he possessed more profound insight into the needs and problems of the church than did the church itself. The Church at Antioch felt grateful and indebted to the Church at Jerusalem for such farsighted and spiritual care and manifested its gratitude later by means of practical assistance (see chap. 11:27-30).

We find that in their later missionary efforts, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the newly established churches (see Acts 14:23). Yet Paul went one step further and also requested his co-workers to fortify the churches. He wrote to Titus: "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). One can certainly not speak in such an instance of any *absolute* autonomy of the church in matters of administration.

In his letters Paul provided the churches with principles for the nurture and correction of their spiritual life. However, he was not content to leave the matter there but took up special cases which the churches in question seemed unable to handle (see I Cor. 5:1-5; Phil. 4:2). We are quite prepared to grant that Paul, as spiritual father and founder of these churches, enjoyed a singular relationship to them; nevertheless, Paul's action implies a principle which, in certain cases, also has relevance for us in our day.

IN RESPECT TO DOCTRINE

Despite the fact that the apostles received divine truth by

way of special illumination and revelation from God, they sought solutions to difficult questions *together*, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The question of circumcision, and the related question about the necessity of observing the Old Testament law in its entirety, threatened to disrupt the unity of the apostolic churches. Consequently the Church at Antioch, which possessed competent teaching ministers, appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain other brethren to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders assembled to consider this question. They were able to achieve a fine spirit of consensus and unity which pleased both the Holy Spirit and the brethren. The principles of evangelical freedom were then set forth in a letter and teaching brethren were appointed to convey this decision to the churches.

In 1950 a document on "Evangelical Freedom in the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Canada" was presented to the Canadian Conference by the Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns and was adopted by that Conference. In it we note the following significant reference to the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem:

By means of this council the principle was established that for the resolution of difficult questions, one assemble, deliberate and come to a consensus. Then the resultant decision is to be conveyed to the churches, to serve as a guide for church life and action. Such decisions should conform to the Word and directive guidance of God. The resolution of these questions was not left to individual churches, not even to Paul or Peter, but was expected from the corporate body of mature brethren.¹

It is to be noted that although the initiative for the resolution of the problem was taken by one church, the Church at Antioch, the decision itself was binding upon the entire brotherhood. When Paul and Silas embarked upon their second missionary journey through Asia Minor, they visited all the churches which Paul and Barnabas had founded during their first missionary journey. Luke reported concerning their ministry in the churches as follows: "As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4).

In his book, *Principles of Church Polity*, George T. Ladd, a Congregationalist who is otherwise a strong advocate of the

autonomy of the local church, writes as follows concerning the action of the apostles in Acts 15:

Here, certainly, was an unsolicited attempt, on the part of the officers and brethren of the Church at Jerusalem, to hold communion by way of advice with several remote churches. Indeed, although the address of the letter limited it to Syria and Cilicia, the intention seems to have been to recommend its measures, with the conceded authority of the apostles and the officers of the mother church, to all Gentile Christians.²

Ladd comments further that although the churches did not seek advice from the apostles, they accepted it eagerly and without contradiction.

The insight and judgment of the corporate brotherhood was considered significant by the apostle Paul in regard to his teaching practise. He exhorted the Church at Corinth that women in the church keep silence "as in all the churches of the saints" (see I Cor. 14:34). In I Corinthians 7, where Paul sets forth guidelines for marriage and divorce, he adds, "This is my rule in all the churches" (I Cor. 7:17). After he has commented upon the contentious question concerning the proper head covering for women, he concludes his instructions with the significant statement: "If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God" (I Cor. 11:16).

Paul expresses this frequently repeated principle so fittingly in his Letter to the Philippians: "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:16).

That the local church, in respect to its spiritual life and care, cannot demand or claim utter independence arises from another circumstance. The various gifts of the Spirit are not all present in every local church. We do not find all of the offices or gifts enumerated in Ephesians 4:11 in the churches of the apostolic period. In Antioch there were prophets and teachers but not evangelists. Philip, the evangelist, ministered in a number of places. Apollos and Zenas, the lawyer, evidently served as itinerant ministers in the interests of a general deepening of the spiritual life in the churches (see Titus 3:13). These workers, as also others like Artemas and Tychicus, were not called by the churches but were sent into these churches by Paul. The independence of a local church in regard to the management of its own internal affairs does not preclude the need for supervision

and spiritual care for the *entire* brotherhood. An emphasis upon the absolute autonomy of the local church, in view of the above considerations, must result in internal impoverishment. Some independent churches today provide tragic evidence of such impoverishment. I quote once more from the Conference document cited earlier:

Also in respect to church matters, the apostle Paul was obliged to offer counsel to Timothy and Titus who, while themselves possessing the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth, nevertheless needed the guidance of the brother. By themselves they would not have managed. Similarly, we who are not apostles and who do not receive direct revelations by the Holy Spirit as they did, are dependent upon and responsible to the corporate brotherhood.³

In the welfare and missionary activity of the apostolic churches we encounter the same kind of mutual dependence and organic unity.

At the beginning of the history of our brotherhood, whether we go back to the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century or to the origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church almost one hundred years ago, we discover no trace of the absolute autonomy of the local church. Thus, for example, while the Molotschna Colony consisted of more than fifty villages, there existed only one Mennonite Brethren Church—the "Rueckenaue" —during the first fifty years. A thoroughgoing study of the autonomy of the local church in our own history lies outside the limits of this essay and I therefore refer the reader to *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde 1860-1954* by Abraham H. Unruh.⁴

The Lord grant our Brotherhood the grace needed for a biblical cooperation among the local churches which enables individual congregations to be strengthened, established and enriched and our collective mission mandate to be fulfilled in a manner that honors our Lord and Master.

ENDNOTES

1 "Die Evangelische Freiheit in den M. B. Gemeinden Kanadas," 1950 Year Book of the Fortieth Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North

America (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1950), p. 124.

2 George T. Ladd, *Principles of Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882), p. 264.

3 "Die Evangelische Freiheit," p. 125.

4 Abraham H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde 1960-1954* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1954).

CONSECRATION AS RELATED TO OUR VOCATION *

One of the perennial problems of the Christian church is to make its unchanging faith and its biblical ethics relevant in a changing culture and in a changing social order. History shows very clearly that Christians have not always found it easy to be *in* the world and yet not *of* the world. The believer is to live a separated life and yet to give his testimony in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15). A brief historical survey may be helpful for a proper perspective on the approach to this problem.

The early Christians lived "loosely" in this world. They were not attached to the things of this world and gladly suffered the loss of their possessions (Heb. 10:34). When persecution scattered them, individual members went everywhere, preaching the Word. They made their vocation subservient to the cause of Christ. They continued their professional work in order to promote the expansion of the kingdom of God (Acts 18:1-3). There was no division between things "secular" and things "sacred" in their philosophy of life. Their total life was dedicated to Christ and his church.

In the fourth century the church underwent a tremendous change. The union of church and state revolutionized the social order. Now all vocations were Christian or, perhaps more accurately, none of them were! The soldier's profession as well as the bishop's office were sanctified by both church and state. The result of this great change was not the Christianization of the world but rather the secularization of the church. Consequently, those who desired to live a life of holiness and consecration withdrew from the regular course of life and went into the monasteries. Henceforth only those individuals were considered to be

* *The Voice* 10 (September-October 1961): 3-6, and 10 (November-December 1961): 3-6.

saints who withdrew from all vocations and severed all family connections. The identification of sanctification with isolation led to a complete perversion of the scriptural doctrine of sanctification.

The reformers rejected the distinction between clergy and laity and emphasized the priesthood of all believers. Men like Martin Luther left the monasteries, took up useful vocations, married, established homes, and took Christianity back into the world of real life. The acceptance of the principle of union of church and state, however, created a serious dilemma for Luther and his followers. Can the life of consecration be reconciled at all times with submission to the secular powers? The great reformer Luther resolved this problem by his doctrine that only man's *inner life* is subject to the law of God. In his *outward life* man must submit to the powers that be. In case of a conflict between the law of Christ and the demands of Caesar, the Christian must yield to the citizen!

The Anabaptists were not satisfied with such half-way measures. They taught that the life of every true Christian must be subject to the lordship of Christ without reservation. That meant that they could not enter certain vocations. They rejected magistracy, war service, and certain commercial vocations as unsuitable for a true follower of Christ. They condemned commercial pursuits because the latter were often identified with corruption and usury. Like the early Christians, the Anabaptists were not attached to private property. Gladly they shared their means and possessions with fellow members. This attitude was the fruit of a new concept of the Christian's chief vocation in this world. For many of these "soldiers of the cross," their trade or profession was only an avenue for the propagation of the Christian faith.

Modern evangelicalism has often drawn a rather sharp line of distinction between faith and ethics, religion and business. Piety is often largely confined to a profession on Sunday, and does not find expression in practice on Monday. Our Brotherhood in America has not been immune to such disintegrating influences. As a people, moreover, we are going through a severe cultural crisis. Changes in our vocational life are at the very center of this crisis. Our cultural and vocational pattern has undergone such drastic changes within the last twenty-five years that as churches we have not kept pace in relating our faith and ethics to these changed conditions. We stand in need of reorientation and readjustment.

How will true consecration manifest itself in relation to our vocation? On the basis of the teaching of Scripture, several answers will be suggested in this article.

IN THE WISE CHOICE OF OUR VOCATION

The choice of a vocation was a relatively simple matter in our historic past. By and large, our people lived in rural, agricultural communities. Geographical isolation on the one hand, and almost unlimited opportunities for agricultural expansion on the other, tended to make the marriage between *the Bible and the plow* quite stable and permanent. Most young men followed the traditional vocation of their forebears and became farmers. A small number were engaged in the teaching profession and in certain handicrafts. Daughters did not face this problem at all because no vocations were open to them.

All this has changed completely in recent decades. Agricultural opportunities have become severely limited. Only young men with considerable capital can afford to start farming. Educational opportunities for our young people, however, have increased rapidly in the last few years and opened the door to a wide range of vocations for both men and women. According to a recent survey, less than two per cent of the graduates of our private schools in British Columbia take up farming after finishing their high school training. The situation is quite similar in other provinces.

As a Brotherhood, we have not given sufficient consideration to this important issue of a proper choice of vocation in relation to our Christian witness and evangelistic outreach. We are inclined to rationalize our indifference by making the unfounded assertion that a Christian can be a witness in any vocation. We all know that some vocations by their very nature make a Christian witness impossible; others are of doubtful value in this respect. The true believer must be able to witness not only *in* his vocation but also *by* his vocation.

The wise choice of a vocation will be governed by basic scriptural principles. Before making such an important decision, the young person should find a satisfactory answer to the following questions:

1. Does the vocation present serious threats to my Christian life? Will the vocation in question compel me to compromise my convictions? Will I be exposed to temptations and dangers which will undermine my faith? The ability to lead a separate life must

definitely enter into our considerations when we think of choosing a profession. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians is certainly applicable to this problem: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness. . . ? Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord" (II Cor. 6:14-17). There are positions and professions which are detrimental to the growth of Christian faith. By identifying ourselves with doubtful and even sinful practices we lose our spiritual vision, and eventually may experience a loss of our assurance of salvation. Parents and young people facing vocational opportunities and choices should give heed to the words of Christ: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness. . ." (Matt. 6:33).

Before choosing a vocation the Christian should ask himself another question:

2. Does the vocation provide opportunities for the proper nurture of my Christian life? The child of God, and especially the young Christian, is in constant need of spiritual instruction. Of the early Christians we read: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. . ." (Acts 2:42). A believer needs fellowship for growth in his Christian life. Zinzendorf claimed that Christianity cannot survive without fellowship. Certain vocations make it almost impossible to observe the day of rest and to attend church services for spiritual instruction and edification. A Christian should think twice before entering upon a career or calling which completely cuts him off from the fellowship of God's people. I have great admiration for a group of brethren on the West Coast who refused to accept work in a certain plant on the basis of this principle. In considering the proposition, the brethren came to the conclusion that it was better to suffer material loss than to lose the blessings of the day of rest and fellowship with God's people. God always honors those who honor him.

A third question enters into the consideration of a proper choice:

3. Does the vocation promise opportunities for an effective Christian witness? It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to be a witness for Christ. We have been saved to serve the living and true God. Not all vocations provide actual opportunities for effective witness and outreach. The work in some professions demands a complete isolation from society. On the other hand, there are vocations which require daily contact with

our fellow men. During World War II our men in Alternative Service preferred hospital work to service in some isolated camp in a national park. The former type of work had a much greater witness potential since it was directly related to the physical and spiritual needs of men. We have observed that students who have been engaged in certain professions prior to coming to College occasionally change to another vocation when they become more aware of their responsibility in personal evangelism.

If the young people in our churches are to find a satisfactory answer to the above questions, they must be given more information and better guidance. If we want to channel our young people into vocations which are more directly related to the cause of Christ, parents, pastors, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders will have to take a much more active interest in vocational guidance. As a brotherhood which has spiritual concerns and objectives, we dare not surrender this responsibility to secular institutions which are largely motivated by material considerations in their program of vocational counselling. The first step in making a wise choice is to know God's will in the matter. Consecration in our vocational life begins with a proper choice and an adequate preparation for life's work.

Some years ago I met a high school graduate on my way home from school. Our conversation turned to the choice of a profession. I was startled and perplexed when this young man, who came from a good Mennonite home, told me that he had decided to be a policeman. Here, I felt, counselling was desperately needed. My young friend was open to advice and to a further study of the problem. I pointed out to him that it might be much more profitable to spend life in the prevention of crime than in the punishment of crime, and that a teacher would make a more vital contribution to both church and state than an officer of the law. I was pleased to learn several years later that the young man had heeded the advice. He has become a public school teacher as well as a Sunday school teacher in one of our communities.

Sanctification in our vocational life begins with a wise choice. Failure here often has tragic consequences, and the mistakes made in youth can only be partly rectified in later life.

IN THE HIGH STANDARDS OF OUR VOCATION

The Christian's professional life must be on a higher level than that of his unsaved friends. The highest moral and ethical

principles, as taught by Christ and the apostles, must govern every aspect of his activity. Let us note several guiding principles.

First is the standard of honesty. The apostle Paul exhorts believers with these words: "Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). This principle of honesty and truthfulness is primarily related to our *word*. The first judgment in the apostolic Church fell upon dishonest members (Acts 5:1-11). In describing the shocking moral conditions among Latin Americans, many of whom have a nominal affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church, Robert H. Glover mentions especially their dishonesty.¹ Unfortunately, this sin is not confined to certain nominal Christians in South America, but is also quite prevalent among professional Christians in North America, even in our circles and especially in business relationships. God expects of his children a "hard veracity," an absolute truthfulness under all circumstances.

One relationship in which honesty is often put to a severe test involves employer-employee relationships. An employer should be honest in his dealings with his workers with regard to conditions of work, hours of service, wages, fringe benefits. Christian employers should set an example in truthfulness as well as in friendliness in their association with their employees. Conversely, the employee should be honest with regard to his qualifications for a certain position. A parade of questionable degrees and diplomas in school catalogues or on letterheads is certainly contrary to the principle of truthfulness.

Another area in which honesty is tested is in business dealings. This applies to the farmer as well as to the grocer and implement dealer. There must be honesty in the advertising of products. Certain professions are exposed to special temptations. For an automobile salesman, a real estate salesman, or an insurance agent, it is not always easy to be honest in his business dealings. The Christian will sometimes be obliged to speak to his own hurt financially. But experience has shown that even in such vocations "honesty is the best policy," and that God blesses those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

In the professional relationships of doctors, teachers, and ministers, honesty is also important. Psychological and pedagogical considerations can easily be used as pretexts for slight deviations from the scriptural standard of honesty. Professional codes of ethics may not always be in line with the prin-

ciples of the New Testament. Even ministers of the gospel are not immune to the temptation of prevarication or of tampering with facts and figures. As ministers of the gospel and as messengers of the truth, it should fill our hearts with shame and sorrow that the term "evangelistically speaking" is often associated in the popular mind with "stretching the truth." The publicized figures of attendance at evangelistic meetings and the reported number of converts after an evangelistic campaign can often not be accepted at face value. The number of people who have requested spiritual help, perhaps by an uplifted hand, are recorded and reported in the papers as so many decisions for Christ.

The New Testament expects a basic honesty of every believer but especially of the preacher. Paul exhorts Timothy to be "an example of the believers, in word" (I Tim. 4:12). The devaluation of the Christian's word has more serious consequences for kingdom work than the devaluation of the dollar. It used to be said of our early Brethren that their word was as good as a bond. May God help us to strengthen our testimony by a rededication to the standard of honesty in our vocational life.

The standard of faithfulness is also vital to the life of consecration in our vocation. In I Cor. 4:2 we read: "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." The principle of faithfulness is especially related to our work. What should characterize the faithful steward in his vocation?

A faithful steward must be conscientious in his daily tasks. The consecrated Christian will be diligent in the performance of his routine duties. Consecration in our vocation certainly should imply hard, honest work. Unfortunately, many young people today are more interested in a full-time salary than in full-time service. The true Christian will perform his tasks as "unto the Lord" and will meet his obligations promptly and conscientiously. It has been a very gratifying experience for us in the administration of the Bible College that the services of our students have been in constant demand by various organizations and employers. Faithfulness in little things is the test of character in the work of the kingdom.

Faithfulness in our vocational life should also find expression in dependability in financial matters. Consecration is tested in tithes and offerings. In all letters of reference for Christian service this point is stressed. Good stewardship finds expression in a wise and proper handling of financial matters. The faithful Christian will give unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar

— but he will also give to God the things that belong to God. He will conscientiously pay his property tax and his income tax to the state, but he will also contribute generously to the work of the church. Christ has made it very plain that only those who are faithful in that which is least (money) are also faithful in much (spiritual riches). In Luke 16:11 this principle is clearly stated: "If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"

It should also be mentioned that this faithfulness in our vocation will find expression in a proper attitude to our associates and fellow workers. A true Christian never treats others as means but always as ends — as persons whose rights and privileges are respected and who are accepted for what they are.

Third, a life of consecration in our vocation is marked by the standard of usefulness. The apostle Paul describes the true Christian as one who is engaged in useful activity, "doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Eph. 4:28). A Christian vocation must be one of service. In his stimulating little book, *God Calls Me*, J. Winston Pearce contends that "God does not call his children to useless, unproductive, futile, parasitical tasks."² There is work to be done in the church and in the kingdom — hard work, useful work — work that will help and not hurt, build and not tear down, strengthen and not weaken. The Christian is under a sacred obligation to make a positive contribution through his vocation; he must relate his vocation to the promotion of the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of his fellow men.

This standard of usefulness eliminates certain vocations for the Christian. Can a Christian pursue his high and holy calling as a bartender, saloonkeeper, munitionmaker, or as a soldier who is under obligations to destroy life? Such professions are not only unproductive and futile but positively sinful! But what about a career in the entertainment world, or in professional sports? Can one ask for God's help and blessing on an occupation which at best must be classified as marginal, if not trivial? We are to "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 2:10).

Usefulness implies a *plus* factor in our professional work. The consecrated Christian brings to his vocation something which is lacking in the work of the non-Christian. He is prepared to go beyond the letter of the law, he is willing to render service beyond the demands of duty, he is ready to walk the second mile. The exhortations of Paul to Philemon beautifully portray this plus factor in our vocational responsibilities.

The standards mentioned above imply a biblical nonconformity to common customs and practices in today's world. Adherence to biblical principles in our vocation may lead to tension and problems in our relationships with business associates or fellow employees who do not share our convictions. This is to be expected! But it is also true that nonconformity to worldly practices often opens new doors for a positive Christian witness. We agree with the main thesis of a book by Niebuhr, Miller and Pauck, who contend that the church must be against the world to save the world.

IN THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE OF OUR VOCATION

There are two overruling objectives for the Christian to which all his efforts must be subordinated. The first is the promotion of the cause of Christ. Our Lord enunciated this principle very clearly in Matt. 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." No Christian can claim to be exempt from this law — the kingdom comes first. Whatever proves to be our proper sphere in life, it is our first responsibility, as well as our highest privilege, so to labor that the kingdom of God may be extended and established. By our means and by our ministry we are to promote the interests of our Lord. Private interests, family interests, national interests must not interfere with this primary duty of the Christian life. In the Gospels we read of certain prospective followers of Christ who were interested in his teachings but who were disqualified for discipleship because they put private interests first. When a lesser interest usurps the first place, Rowland Hogben warns us, we are not prepared to admit the "severe exclusiveness of God's claim."³ Directly or indirectly, our vocation must be related to the work of the church and missions. The contribution our vocation makes to the cause of Christ will be its ultimate test in God's sight (II Cor. 5:10).

Another objective is the glorification of the name of God. This objective is clearly stated by Paul: "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

Our life and walk, our vocation, is to adorn the doctrine of Christ. Our life and work is to be the occasion for our fellowmen to glorify God. In Romans 2:24, the apostle Paul pronounces a terrible indictment on certain people: "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Christ exhorts us to let our light so shine before men that they may see our good

works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). In the early Church the members consecrated their possessions as well as their vocation to Christ. As a result of such practical demonstration of true consecration, the witness of the Church became more dynamic and almost irresistible. We read in Acts 4:33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness . . . and great grace was upon them all."

A genuine consecration to our vocation to Christ and his cause would have a revolutionary effect upon our churches and communities. Our sphere of influence would be tremendously enlarged, and our witness be greatly strengthened. We must admit that a failure in consecration in this area of our life has led to many shameful denials of our Lord. Christ's challenge to discipleship applies to our vocation. He is our pattern in all things. We are to follow in his steps. May the words of Charles Wesley become the motto of our life:

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill:
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will!

ENDNOTES

1 Robert H. Glover, *The Progress of World-Wide Missions*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 276.

2 J. Winston Pearce, *God Calls Me* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1958), p. 70.

3 Rowland Hogben, *Vocation* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1938), p. 25.

THE CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER WITH CULTURE *

The relationship of Christianity to culture constitutes a problem that has perplexed true followers of Christ across the centuries. In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition the tension between Christian faith and culture has often resulted in serious controversies and conflicts in the sphere of ethics.

The tensions between Christian ethics and a particular culture can never be fully resolved because culture, although conservative in nature, is constantly changing. Such a changing culture demands a re-examination and at times a re-formulation of the Christian response to various social, economic or political issues. Although the Christian ethic contains certain absolutes, because it is based on divine revelation, it must nevertheless be constantly related to a dynamic culture. We cannot rely on yesterday's answers in meeting today's problems.

As Mennonite Brethren, and this fact would apply to evangelicals in general, we have not developed a biblical philosophy of change. As a result, we have in the past wasted much spiritual energy in fighting cultural change. Today, we are losing our spiritual energy and identity in many instances by falling into the opposite error of complete conformity to the existing cultural pattern.

Because of migration from country to country with the resultant changes in language, vocation, education, and customs, the Mennonite brotherhood has possibly encountered greater cultural changes than many other religious bodies. This in turn has created greater problems in relating an unchanging faith to a changing culture without sacrificing ethical principles.

I would like to approach the problem from two perspectives: the historical and the biblical. The first is necessary for a proper

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 22 February 1974, pp. 2-4, 6.

understanding of our dilemma; the second will, hopefully, provide some guidelines for a proper reaction to a changing culture.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Mennonites, as the spiritual descendants of the Radical Reformers (Anabaptists) of the sixteenth century, have generally held to the view that culture is antagonistic to the Christian faith. Their understanding of the biblical dualism of church and world resulted in a conception of "Christ against culture." The "Christian sacralism" which the Anabaptists found in the large state-church systems of Western Europe no doubt strengthened this conviction among our forefathers.

However, no church can live indefinitely in a cultural vacuum. Through the years, Mennonites have been forced to adjust and relate to various cultures. Once they came to terms with a given culture, they were often tempted to identify their faith with that culture. This marriage of faith to a particular culture has had disastrous consequences for the ministry and mission of the church. The Mennonite brotherhood, however, is not the only religious body that has succumbed to this temptation!

Three points of view have been predominant in the reaction of Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren to a changing culture.

When our people moved from the Netherlands to the Vistula Delta in the late sixteenth century, they found themselves in a foreign land. They continued to identify their faith with the Dutch language and Dutch customs for more than 200 years. According to Smith, they remained a "pure Dutch community" in the midst of a Polish — and later a Prussian — environment. Reluctantly they yielded to the stronger pressures of a German culture in the middle of the eighteenth century.¹

By the time of their emigration from Prussia to Russia at the end of the eighteenth century, the Mennonites had embraced the German culture so wholeheartedly that it became inseparably linked to their faith. Because of the isolation of the Mennonite colonies from the mainstream of Russian life, no "acculturation" took place, and Russian culture, with a few exceptions, remained foreign to our people. It was also viewed by many as incompatible with Anabaptist faith and practice, which could be preserved and promoted best in the context of German language and culture.

With this cultural heritage, the Mennonite Brethren, as well as the other Mennonites, came to America. Here they were con-

fronted with an Anglo-Saxon or American culture. In our churches there has in times past been a strong tendency to identify this new culture with "worldliness," and true Christianity with a German-European culture.

"Deutsch" and religion were inseparably linked in our philosophy of education, and the preservation of German language and culture played an important role in the founding of our private schools. This was not necessarily wrong, because culture can also be an aid and an asset in the preservation of the Christian faith.

The rejection of new cultural patterns can be observed in various areas. One is the matter of dress. Certain very conservative groups have adopted the mode or style of dress of an earlier and different historical epoch, and made it normative for all time. Hence one may see some Old Order Amish people in America today dressed in the garb that their forebears in Switzerland were wearing 300 years ago. In the seventeenth century, however, it was not the distinctive attire of a religious group, but of society in general. But the cultural has been so completely identified with the ethical, that a change in the mode of dress would be condemned today by that church group as a violation of their code of ethics.

The biblical principles of modesty, chastity, and simplicity are normative for Christians at any time and in any culture. But can these principles not find application and expression in various forms?

Another illustration of the confusion of the cultural and the ethical may be found in the area of wedding ceremonies and celebrations. In the Mennonite constituencies in Prussia and Russia certain stereotyped forms had become generally accepted. In Canada, with its Anglo-Saxon cultural roots, different practices prevailed, not only in society at large but also in the evangelical churches. Here, in the new world, the wedding ceremony made provision for a number of attendants (bridesmaids and best men), and even for a "ring ceremony."

These novel features were criticized and even condemned as "worldly" by many Mennonite Brethren ministers who came into the country in the 1920's, although one could possibly find more scriptural support for the new practice than for the old. One can observe the same pattern of response and reaction to the introduction of other "new" things such as cars, radios, and television.

For centuries, our people have lived and moved in rural

communities. They have been engaged primarily in farming and related pursuits. The Christian faith of our forefathers became closely linked to a rural culture. "Bible and plow" became the symbols of our way of life. The city was regarded as more sinful and corrupt than the country, with a good deal of biblical and historical evidence to support such a view.

When Mennonite Brethren began to move into the cities, the trend was viewed with great apprehension by church and conference leadership. Urban life-styles were generally equated with worldliness. Moreover, urbanization was closely related to higher education, involvement in business, and professional careers — all areas to which our traditional "farm ethic" could not readily be applied.

That the early Anabaptists were found mainly in the cities of South Germany and Switzerland has apparently been completely overlooked in dealing with the problem of urbanization. Instead of working diligently at finding biblical guidelines for a proper Christian business and professional ethic, we have often spent our time and energy in repudiating the new cultural and vocational opportunities.

In the last few decades our churches have gradually drifted in the direction of cultural conformity. This indiscriminate acceptance of culture poses the most serious threat to the spirituality and ministry of our church today. In *The Free Church and Seductive Culture*, Calvin Redekop points out that whenever this happens, the church loses its transcendent nature and becomes a mere reflection of society.² In such an identification of Christian ethics with the Canadian or American way of life, the church loses its relevance and its ministers become priests of the establishment instead of being prophets of God.

Conformity to culture is so perilous because the latter is never neutral. We know that both communism and fascism have consciously and deliberately attempted to create and mold a culture in conformity with their ideology. In the western world, the spirit of materialism has saturated our whole way of life. In a more subtle way than communism or fascism, this materialistic culture tends to influence the views and practices of the church. Isolation from culture leads to irrelevance; identification with culture leads to loss of identity. This is the dilemma which calls for a biblical perspective.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the complex society of the present day it is not always

easy to walk, work, and witness as a true follower of Christ. What shall I do in this situation? Where can I find guidance on choices to be made? What is the Christian thing to do under these circumstances? These and similar questions are asked by Christians every day. Often we must choose between alternatives, and, as Carl F. H. Henry points out, the Christian "does not have the ease of deciding between a moral black or white. Usually all he sees are varying shades of gray."³

For authoritative guidelines in the area of Christian ethics the believer turns to the teachings of Christ and the New Testament. The latter must not be conceived, however, as a code of moral law which provides detailed regulations for Christian conduct. The New Testament provides basic principles which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will help the Christian to make the proper response to the will of God as well as to culture. Let us briefly state several of these principles.

First, in Philippians 1:9-10 the apostle Paul writes: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent. . . ." To the Thessalonians he gives a similar exhortation: "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21).

We need to discern between good and evil, between the true and the false, between the right and the wrong. Our culture is characterized by many things that are sinful and contrary to the will of God. Such practices as abortion, extra-marital sex, divorce and re-marriage, homosexuality, militarism and violence are all a part of the way of life of modern society. Other things may be in the "gray area" and also give rise to grave ethical problems. The discerning Christian will detect the evil in these "doubtful things" and abstain from them.

In our discernment, however, we must go beyond the distinction of right and wrong. "For the Christian," writes David Ewert, "it is to be a principle of life to choose that which is best."⁴ The good can be the enemy of the better. Recreation is good, but if one spends his Sundays in recreational activities instead of in worship and service of God, the "good" may become an evil.

The diligent study of the Word of God, and the seeking of divine guidance in prayer, will lead to the development of a keen spirit of discernment, which will also enable us to differentiate between the good and the better.

Second, the Christian has been set free by Christ's redemp-

tive work. Paul exhorts us to preserve this freedom: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

The improper use of this liberty may lead to a new bondage. Hence Paul also writes: "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything" (I Cor. 6:12b).

The bondage that Paul speaks of is not the bondage of sin, but the bondage of the *adiaphora* (things in the middle). "True freedom in Christ gives one the strength to refrain from certain activities or to limit one's participation."⁵

Sport constitutes a significant aspect of our Canadian culture. Although it is a "lawful" activity, it has enslaved many people, including a goodly number of our church members. The person who has to attend every hockey game or watch every football game has become enslaved by a "lawful thing."

This principle would apply equally to such activities as hunting, fishing, golfing or playing chess. When these things take priority in the life of a believer he becomes a slave of selfish indulgence rather than being a servant of his Master, Jesus Christ.

Third, the degree and nature of our involvement in cultural pursuits must be determined by the effect of such involvement on our spiritual life. The apostle Paul used this principle of edification in making his decisions. "All things are lawful," he writes, "but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify" (I Cor. 10:23).

It is important to remember here that in settling any question one must think not only of personal edification but also of the edification of fellow believers. It is possible that something could edify me (e.g., a certain type of church music) which would have the opposite effect on my fellow believers. Christians should be engaged in things which edify. This edification or building up applies to man's body, to man's mind, and to man's spirit or soul (cf. Phil. 4:8).

According to the teaching of the New Testament, the drinking of wine could be classified among the "lawful things." The Bible assumes that moderate wine drinking is proper, while it always condemns drunkenness. But is moderate indulgence in the drinking of wine or beer always profitable and edifying?

Several years ago this question was warmly debated by our brethren in the Paraguayan Chaco. The extremely hot weather removed the question from the academic plane to a very practical level. They came to the conclusion that the Scriptures do not teach total abstinence. However, another dimension entered

into the discussion — their concern for the spiritual welfare of their Indian brethren. Alcoholism had been a curse among these people in their pre-conversion state. A concern for their edification resulted in the spirit of Rom. 14:21. The believer's liberty is not license.

Fourth, the Christian is not to be conformed to the present world, he is not to be squeezed into its cultural mold, but he is to be transformed by the renewal of his mind (Rom. 12:2). Nonconformity is not primarily a matter of difference in external behavior, but a difference in our inner attitudes, aspirations and in our sense of values. This inner "nonconformity" will also find expression in a new life-style. Inner transformation will always result in outward nonconformity. New Testament Christians were known by their "way of life." They were known as people of "the Way" (Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). We agree with the thesis of Niebuhr, Miller and Pauck, that the church must be against the world to save the world.

The Christian faith has suffered from two extremes in the past. One is the complete externalization of religion, according to which the Christian life is measured in terms of an outward observance of a legal code. This approach leads to legalism and pharisaism. The other extreme is a complete internalization of the faith. The inner experience does not manifest itself in a new life-style. This way leads to a false libertarianism and irrelevance. The second appears to pose the greater threat to our church life at the present time.

A fifth principle is expressed in Paul's words, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). If this principle has its application to things that we call the necessities of life (eating and drinking), it would appear that we ought to be even more careful when we deal with things which are not necessities. We can please God and glorify him only when we know his will and accept the priorities he has set forth in his Word (cf. Matt. 6:33).

Culture can be a great servant, but it is always a poor master. The late Benjamin B. Janz gave us this timely warning: "Never use Christianity to promote culture, but use culture to promote Christianity." May it ever be thus in our Brotherhood.

ENDNOTES

1 Charles Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, 4th ed., rev. Cornelius Krahn (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1957), p. 271.

2 Calvin Redekop, *The Free Church and Seductive Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1970), chap. 3.

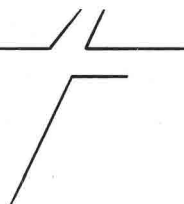
3 Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1957), p. 419.

4 David Ewert, *An Approach to Problems of Christian Ethics* (Pamphlet I, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 24 March 1967), p. 14.

5 Ibid., p. 15.

Part Two

The History and Theology of the Church



THE CONGREGATION OF RADICAL BIBLE READERS *

Some years ago Dr. Sam Kuelling of St. Chrischona wrote a pamphlet entitled *Das Uebel an der Wurzel Erfassen*¹ (Getting Hold of the Root of Evil). His concern was that we must begin with new theological training for new life in the church. The Anabaptists approached the problems of church and society with a new understanding of the Scriptures. Carl A. Cornelius called them "the congregation of radical Bible readers."² In a deeper sense than Luther, they observed the principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). From the court records of the sixteenth century it is evident that the Anabaptists possessed an amazing knowledge of the Scriptures. This proficiency in the use of the Scriptures was sometimes explained as being due to demon possession.

The knowledge of the Scriptures was acquired by diligent reading and memorization. In a letter one Anabaptist wrote: "I hope to be able to learn one hundred chapters of the Testament by heart."³ Although their primary emphasis was on the New Testament, the Anabaptists did not reject the Old. "All Scripture," declared Menno, "both of the Old and New Testament rightly explained according to the intent of Christ Jesus and his holy apostles is profitable for doctrine . . ."⁴ The Anabaptists were the people of one Book.

The Anabaptists' concern about a knowledge of the Scriptures led to a concern about translations. It is common knowledge that Luther used Denck and Haetzer's translation of the Old Testament prophets. In South Germany and Switzerland the Anabaptists used the Froschauer Bible. In the Netherlands, the Bieskens Bible was most popular and appeared in one hundred editions. The Anabaptists utilized the Scriptures exten-

* Lecture delivered at the Believers' Church Conference at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas on 11 November 1974.

sively.

Menno and other Anabaptist leaders had to fight against two fronts — the dogmatism of Roman Catholicism and the spiritualism of the enthusiasts (*Schwaermer*). Against the former Menno emphasized the meaning of Scripture, and against the latter Menno emphasized the letter of Scripture. Neither group had a proper view of divine revelation.

THE NATURE OF THEIR BIBLICISM

Of what did their biblicism consist? First, it consisted of a new understanding of the authority of the Scriptures. The Bible was the only authority for their faith and life. This was contrary to the Roman Catholic view that authority resided in both the Scriptures and tradition. This view also differed from the Reformers, in several ways. For Luther, what was not explicitly prohibited in the Scriptures was permitted, whereas for the Anabaptists what was not commanded was prohibited! Furthermore, while the Reformers applied the Scriptures primarily to the doctrines of justification and salvation, the Anabaptists applied it extensively to ethics and ecclesiology. Thus, contrary to Luther, the Epistle of James was not an "epistle of straw" for the Anabaptists. Sebastian Franck lamented that while formerly people were work-saints (*Werkheilige*), now they were Word-saints (*Wort-Heilige und Maulchristen*). The Anabaptists, however, combined the two in a remarkable way. The Scriptures must be read in order to be observed.

There was also a strong aversion to rigid dogmatism. Such dogmatism is often the greatest obstacle in the proper use and deeper understanding of the Scriptures. For the Anabaptists a proper formulation of truth was no evidence of true orthodoxy. The verbalization of a confession of faith, its repetition every Sunday, was not important. Hence they were reluctant to express their faith in theses or confessional documents. Anabaptists preferred biblical terminology.

The confessions of faith of the Anabaptists were more descriptive than prescriptive. They accepted a *closed canon*, but not a *closed theological system*. The first confession (Schleitheim, 1527) also gave practical guidelines for the work of the church.

The greatest difference in the Anabaptist understanding of Scripture, however, was their view of the progressive nature of revelation. Here there is tremendous confusion among American evangelicals. To understand Anabaptist theology, one must draw a comparison between the Reformers and the Anabaptists. Karl

Barth states that according to Reformed doctrine, the Scriptures are an organized whole, in which a sovereign God manifests his will and commandments to his church. Hence there can be no principal distinctions within the Scriptures, nor between the Old and New Testaments.⁵ For Menno, however, this organic unity is centered in Christ. "The demands from Sinai and through the prophets are reduced, concentrated, and absolutized through Christ and the witness of the apostles for the Christian Church."⁶

One of the favorite passages of the Anabaptists was Romans 13:8-10 where Paul speaks about the all-encompassing influence and power of love. He says that all the commandments are comprehended in one. They are absolutized and concretized: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The Anabaptists also had a great appreciation for the Sermon on the Mount because here they found a kind of absolutization and simplification of the Old Testament commands in the teachings of Christ. "The Mount of Beatitudes reduces the significance of Mount Sinai."⁷ The last Word of God, they felt, was always spoken by Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. Whereas, according to Reformed doctrine, the whole Bible formed an organic unity, for the Anabaptists the New Testament took precedence over the Old.

Furthermore, the Anabaptists made no significant distinctions within the New Testament. Menno reproved Luther for his criticism of the Epistle of James. Nor did the Anabaptists see any conflict or tension between the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE ANABAPTISTS

Various questions arise when the actual task of interpretation begins. How does one apply such a concept of biblical authority? All groups, Catholics and Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and many others, profess to have biblical authority for their views. Who is right?

Authority is not based on single passages or proof texts. The unity of the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, must be preserved. Menno writes: "It is the manner of all heresies, to tear a piece from the midst of Scripture, and thereby prove a preconceived opinion."⁸

Furthermore, authority emerges from the context. Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. Dark passages must be explained through clear (*helle*) passages. The Anabaptists would have agreed with Calvin B. Hanson of Trinity Western College who

stated, "Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light." Oecolampadius once addressed the Swiss brethren with evident irritation: "I know full well that you cry, 'Scripture, Scripture,' asking us for clear words to prove our teaching." His answer was that anointing makes clear words unnecessary!⁹

The Old Testament also was the Word of God for the Anabaptists; it was not only a witness to the Word. There were no Barthians among the Anabaptists! The authority of and reverence for the Old Testament, however, was provisional and relative. The New Testament was final. In his writings, Menno reflects a predominantly New Testament emphasis. New Testament quotations outnumber Old Testament quotations three to one.

Menno's basic position was obedience to Christ and His Word! Christ's teachings must be taken seriously. According to Henry Poettcker, Luther had no holy Scriptures — only a holy doctrine, namely, the doctrine of justification.¹⁰

For Menno all Scripture was inspired.¹¹ While he did not know the original languages, and lacked tools for biblical exegesis, he had a great appreciation for such knowledge when properly used! Too often the letter was used to kill!

There were, however, still other safeguards that were required for a proper biblical understanding. Menno realized that many who studied the Bible carefully, nevertheless arrived at wrong conclusions or were misunderstood by others. He himself was often misunderstood. How can proper consensus and true understanding be reached?

A proper understanding proceeded first from a right attitude and orientation. The new birth was essential! A sharp mind was not sufficient because there are spiritual presuppositions for theological knowledge! This view is in keeping with John 7:17. Also, ethical foundations for understanding are often overlooked. Piety is often more important than intellectual ability.

A proper understanding also emerges in the community of believers. Christ reveals his total counsel to all the saints (Eph. 3:14-21). No individual has a monopoly on the truth!

Finally, the role of the Holy Spirit must be emphasized. Christ, the Scriptures and the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14) are blended in Anabaptist theology. The Word and the Spirit are inseparably linked. The Spirit is understood in the light of the Scriptures and the Scriptures through the illumination of the Spirit.

The Scriptures were, for the Anabaptists, a guide to Christ. The written Word directs to the incarnate Word. They were not

guilty of bibliolatry. They felt the Bible was a book that should constantly be used. Even if it was worn and torn, it was still a sacred book. It was not to be kept in a special place where nobody could ruin it or damage it and where it would be kept in a "sacred" condition. That would be bibliolatry.

Our faith, then, is to be a faith in Christ and the Bible is only a directive, or guide, to Christ. Our faith is to be centered in him.

ENDNOTES

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2 Carl A. Cornelius, as quoted by Cornelius Krahn in *Menno Simons (1496-1561): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten* (Karlsruhe: Verlag Heinrich Schneider, 1936), p. 104.

3 John Christian Wenger, "The Biblicism of the Anabaptists" in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hersherberger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 167.

4 *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), p. 312.

5 As cited by Krahn in *Menno Simons*, p. 108.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 109.

9 Quoted by Wenger in "The Biblicism of the Anabaptists," p. 173.

10 Henry Poettcker, "The Hermeneutics of Menno Simons" (Th. D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 99.

11 See Wenger, "The Biblicism of the Anabaptists," p. 169.

THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE CHURCH *

The Old Testament was the Bible of our Lord Jesus and of the apostles. They used the Old Testament Scriptures as their guide in the building of the church. The key to its correct understanding and its proper use can be found even today in the apostolic practice. We are under obligation to explain and apply the Old Testament as Christ and the apostles did.

It becomes evident in a study of the history of the Christian church that this principle has not always been observed. Many false teachings of the church can be traced back to a faulty understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Instead of using the Old Testament as a foundation for the gospel of salvation, many have used, or, more fittingly said, misused it to justify unchristian and ungodly practices.

The Baptist church historian, Albert H. Newman, draws attention to the fact that after the church-state synthesis of A.D. 323, the church used the Old Testament to justify its persecution of heretics. Newman describes the situation as follows:

The Old Testament, with the majority of Christians, was of equal authority with the New Testament, and was looked upon as containing a model of church polity. Now the Old Testament abounds in narrations in which the persecuting zeal of rulers is represented as highly pleasing to God . . . Christian rulers felt that they were glorifying themselves and God in emulating such examples; and Christian preachers felt that they were filling the place of Old Testament prophets when they incited the rulers to the violent extermination of paganism and heresy.¹

* *The Voice* 6 (September-October 1957): 12-16. Translated by Allen Guenther.

During the Crusades (A.D. 1005-1291) the church justified the extermination of the unbelievers (Jews, Turks and Saracens) by using the example of the Israelite king. Many found grounds for child baptism in the Old Testament practice of circumcision. And until very recent times theologians have sanctioned such wretched and social evils and moral violations as participation in war, slavery and even polygamy on the basis of the Old Testament. Christ and the apostles never used the Old Testament in this way.

One observes that the Old Testament is occasionally misused in our churches as well. By studying the Old Testament independently of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, people reach theological and eschatological conclusions which are inadmissible when viewed in the light of the New Testament.

This study will, of necessity, be limited to the use of the Old Testament in the apostolic church and use evidence drawn from Acts and the Epistles. Here, moreover, a summary of the emphasis of apostolic teaching and practice regarding the use of the Old Testament must suffice.

The apostles used the Old Testament as a *pointer to Christ*. They understood and interpreted the Old Testament christologically. The promises concerning Christ were the central truth of revelation for them. This corresponded to the approval of Jesus and the rabbis: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). Prior to his ascension, the resurrected Lord had clearly and powerfully impressed on them the fact that the Old Testament bore witness to the coming Messiah and Redeemer of the world. After having revealed himself to the disciples late on that first Easter evening, he spoke these memorable words: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Luke adds, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (24:45).

Through this instruction by their Master the disciples reached a new understanding of the Old Testament, an understanding which stood in sharp contrast to the traditional Jewish interpretation. The scribes and Pharisees viewed the Old Testament primarily as a national history centering in Israel; the disciples viewed it primarily as a redemptive history centering in Christ. Christ's example and teaching equipped the apostles to use the Old Testament as a message of salvation.

The Book of Acts provides supporting evidence for this statement. The apostle Peter cites two Davidic psalms (16:8-11; 110:1) in his powerful Pentecost message, thereby substantiating the redemptive character of Christ's resurrection and ascension. For Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, the Old Testament became a pointer to Christ (Acts 12:23-36), and the Law was identified as a schoolmaster to direct one to Christ (Gal. 3:24). In his eloquent defence before King Agrippa, Paul summarized his speech with the words, "I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22,23). When we study those Old Testament passages which are quoted in the New Testament in their original context, we realize that the apostles have spiritualized the Old Testament to some extent. They viewed the history of Israel as the means employed by God to bring salvation to the whole world.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews also used the Old Testament as a pointer to Christ. All elements — the covenant mediator, the sacrifices, the high priestly office — pointed to Christ who was the ultimate mediator, the perfect sacrifice and the divine high priest.

The apostles also used the Old Testament as *evidence for the redemption of all mankind*. In this respect as well the apostolic understanding differed from that of their contemporaries. They discovered in the Old Testament the divine universal missions perspective. This contrasted with Jewish particularism which restricted the promises to Israel. The apostles used the Old Testament Scriptures as evidence for the general meaning and application of the gospel. Thus, Paul and Barnabas felt compelled to turn to the Gentiles in their missionary ministry in Pisidian Antioch because the Jews constantly rejected and scoffed at them and their message. The apostles cited biblical support for their turning to the Gentiles: "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth'" (Acts 13:47; Is. 49:6). In the Epistle to the Romans Paul points out that Jesus and Gentiles are equally guilty of sin (see 3:23) and that there is no difference in the means by which they are saved (ch. 10): "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him" (10:12). In support of this the apostle cites Joel 2:32:

"For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'." In the same context he adduces the evidence of the prophet Isaiah for the universality of redemption: "Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me' " (Rom. 10:20; Is. 65:1).

The many tensions in the Apostolic church between Jewish and Gentile Christians may be traced back to the fact that the Jewish Christians found it difficult to reconcile the salvation and inclusion of Gentiles in the church with their understanding of God's promises to their fathers. Paul's constant argument is that the salvation of the Gentiles is fully consistent with the redemptive purposes of God throughout the Old Testament and that this concept of salvation did not represent a new revelation. Paul concludes the letter to the Christians in Rome, in which he addresses this problem, by skilfully assembling Old Testament texts from the law, psalms and prophets to establish and strengthen this truth:

'Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name'; and again it is said, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people'; and again, 'Praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the people praise him'; and further Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope' (cf. Rom. 15:9-12 and Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Is. 11:10).

It is precisely this usage of the Old Testament which so disturbed the Jewish leaders and scribes. This demonstration of proof by using the Old Testament in large measure destroyed their nationalistic and materialistic hopes for the nation. The kingdom of God was larger in scope and different in nature than was being portrayed by their rabbis.

The apostolic usage of the Old Testament included another significant dimension: *they used it to establish the truth of justification through faith*. As far as Paul was concerned this message was not just a New Testament truth. He finds illustrations and evidence of this biblical teaching in the first book of the Bible. There is, even today among Christians, a generally accepted view that the Old Testament presents a concept of legal justification based on works in contrast to the New Testament justification by faith. The apostles refute this misunderstanding with specific texts and illustrations drawn from the Old Testa-

ment. In Romans 4 Paul raises the question as to whether Abraham was made righteous by his works. Paul pointedly refers to Genesis 15:6: "'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Rom. 4:3). In the same chapter Paul uses David's testimony to confirm the justification by faith (Rom. 4:6-8).

In Galatians Paul clarifies the proper relationship between law and faith. In the process he underlines the impossibility of being justified on legal grounds and demonstrates that the Old Testament prophets had already taught and experienced this truth. Here is the Pauline argument in Galatians 3:11: "Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'" (cf. Hab. 2:4). The apostle viewed Abraham as the spiritual father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11) and the Old Testament saints as a cloud of faithful witnesses who, with us, are members of God's family (Heb. 11:40; 12:1).

There is, however, a further application of the Old Testament by the Apostolic church, namely, *as a warning against spiritual apostasy*. The apostles found in Israel's history more warning signals than road signs for the New Testament church. This principle is of great significance for a correct understanding and proper use of the Old Testament also in our day. Many deviations in teaching and life within the history of Christianity can be traced to a faulty use of the examples of the national and social life of Israel for the life and work of the church. The sacred history of the Old Testament is, as far as it concerns Israel, frequently a sinful history and should serve us as a warning. Paul uses the history of Israel in this way in I Corinthians 10:

Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. . . Do not be idolators as some of them were . . . We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did. . . We must not put the Lord to the test as some of them did. . . nor grumble as some of them did (vv. 6-10).

In verse eleven Paul summarizes these warnings: "Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come."

The apostles were concerned lest Israel's tragic apostasy be repeated in the life of the New Testament church. This is why they draw on the evidence and examples of Israel's history and present them as warning signs for New Testament believers. In

Romans 11, where Paul points out that "because they sinned, salvation has come to the Gentiles", he also warns the believers against a false pride and security: "They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you" (11:20, 21). The apostles never entertained the idea of justifying the sins and errors of the Old Testament faithful or of using them to promote a false sense of liberty or to sanction a casual security in the church. May God give the church today a keen understanding of the serious warnings of the Old Testament.

Finally, the Old Testament was used in the early church as a *source of comfort for those who experienced tests of faith*. The Lord Jesus had forewarned his disciples to expect to experience reviling and persecution for his name's sake: "For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12). The believers found a reflection of their own spiritual experiences in the experiences of the Old Testament saints, particularly as depicted in the Psalms. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews comforts God's people who endured great personal sufferings and the loss of their possessions by highlighting the examples of the Old Testament martyrs (Heb. 11:36-38).

When the apostles returned to their fellow believers after the initial attack by the Sanhedrin, the assaulted young church found a comforting word in the Psalms. Their experience corresponded to the experience of their Lord and Master and this was clearly portrayed in Psalm 2. The Old Testament became a rich source of comfort for the church in the conflicts of faith (Acts 4:23-28).

The guidelines suggested above do not give us an exhaustive description of the New Testament church's use of the Old Testament. They are in my opinion, however, foundational and directional for the exposition and application of the Old Testament.

May the Lord give grace to all who are in the teaching ministry in our churches rightly to share the word of truth given to us in the Old Testament according to the example of Christ and his apostles.

ENDNOTES

1 Albert H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, vol. 1 (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1933), p. 315.

THE RECOVERY OF THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH CONCEPT *

The question as to the true nature of the church is one of the crucial questions in theology today. It arises again and again in ecumenical discussions. The reason for this is simple: the concept of the church has become blurred, and in many instances the New Testament ideal can hardly be recognized. In our search for models we turn to the New Testament. But it is of great significance to discover models in history — the arena for testing theories.

The question as to the nature of the church was one of the cultural questions of the Reformation. In the great religious upheavals of the sixteenth century various new concepts emerged. The various reform movements — Lutheran, Zwinglian, Calvinist, and Anabaptist — were in basic agreement in their soteriology. Men can only be saved by grace through faith! The Radical Reformers, as George H. Williams calls them,¹ also agreed with the Protestant Reformers that the Roman Catholic Church was not the true church. In their attempt to deal with the problem of church reform, however, the Anabaptists proceeded from a different premise: they desired to bring about the *restitution* of the New Testament church. The Reformers, in their view, were satisfied with the *reformation* of the medieval church.

The church of the Middle Ages had moved a long way from the church of the Apostolic Age — in both essence and form. It had become the product of cultural, political, and economic forces. In the New Testament the church is never an institution in the sense of being an object of faith, but rather the people of God, the redeemed community or, in Karl Barth's classical terms, "the living congregation of the living Lord Jesus Christ."²

* Lecture delivered at the Believers' Church Conference at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas on 11 November 1974.

What had transformed the *corpus Christi* (body of Christ) into the *corpus christianum* (Christian civilization)? What had changed the Believers' Church into a Parish Church or *Volkskirche*?

The Reformers, both magisterial and radical, were agreed on two main causes of the corruption of the church, namely, the papal system and the sacerdotal system.

The emergence of Rome as a temporal power in which papal authority or church authority had completely displaced scriptural authority, was a primary obstacle to church renewal. Martin Luther's reestablishment of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) found a warm response among the Radicals in the early years of reform. They admired his stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521 when he stated, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God . . . for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe . . . Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."³ When Luther failed to apply this principle to the problem of church renewal, the "left wing" members of the movement were deeply disappointed.

The sacerdotal system relates to the administration of the sacraments by an official priesthood. Through the sacramental system the church had become the mediator of man's salvation and destiny. Salvation was completely tied to the institutional church. In the words of a noted Church Father: *extra ecclesia nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation). When Luther and Zwingli taught *sola fides*, or the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the German Radicals as well as the Swiss Brethren rejoiced.

There was a third major obstacle to reform, however, which the Protestant Reformers hardly recognized, but which constituted the greatest barrier to church renewal for the Radical Reformers. This was the union of church and state. The Constantinian compromise, or the union of church and state, had been accepted by the Medieval Church as a normal pattern and as a triumph of Christianity. The Reformers did not seriously question this synthesis. The Radical Reformers believed, however, that the apostasy of the church did not begin with the emergence of the papacy but with this unholy alliance of church and state. For the Anabaptists the union of church and state constituted the "fall of the church." Just as there had been a fall of man shortly after creation, so there had been a fall of the church shortly after the creation of the new community. This blending of church and state in a christianized social order constituted a denial of the very nature of the church, according to the Anabaptists. Hence they rejected both the state church of Luther and the church-

state of Calvin, and endeavored to establish congregations after the pattern of the New Testament.

The recovery of the Believers' Church concept can best be observed in the context of the Swiss Reformation. Switzerland was one of the four major areas where the Anabaptists were able to establish Believers' Churches. The other areas were South Germany, Moravia, and the Netherlands.

When Ulrich Zwingli came to the Grossmuenster in Zurich in 1519, he already came as an ardent reformer. With his excellent biblical and humanistic training, he was more inclined toward radical reform than Luther. The Radicals appreciated his preaching against tithes, rents, fasts, and the mercenary system. Among his most devoted supporters were two brilliant university graduates, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, and two ex-priests, Wilhelm Reublin and Georg Blaurock. These radical disciples urged Zwingli to abolish all practices not explicitly taught in Scripture.

Gradually severe tensions developed between Zwingli and the Radicals. Differences came to a head at the First Disputation in October, 1523, when the Radicals demanded the abolition of the Mass. Zwingli was willing to consider the matter and act if he could get the approval of the City Council ("My Lords"). In response Simon Stumpf, one of the Swiss Brethren replied, "Master Ulrich, you have no right to refer this question to the City Council; the matter is already settled, the Spirit of God has decided."⁴ Between 1523 and 1525 there was a gradual alienation of the Brethren from their spiritual mentor.

This schism became complete in January of 1525. The Brethren had instructed their followers not to submit their children to baptism. A disputation on 17 January on the question of infant baptism did not resolve the issue. The Radicals were condemned by the City Council as well as by Zwingli. The penalty for refusal to baptize infants was banishment or even imprisonment.

The Brethren continued to meet separately, searching the Scriptures and praying for guidance. On the evening of 21 January, they met in the home of Felix Manz, near Zwingli's church. After Bible study and prayer, Blaurock asked Grebel to "baptize him with true Christian baptism."⁵ Blaurock then baptized all the others.

This, according to William R. Estep, "was clearly the most revolutionary act of the Reformation."⁶ Here, for the first time in the course of the Reformation, a group of Christians dared to

form a church after what was conceived to be the New Testament pattern. Most free churches of Europe and America are indebted to these pioneers and champions of a Believers' Church.

The development in the Netherlands was somewhat different because it took place in the context of the Catholic Church. In 1536 an ex-priest named Menno Simons joined the young movement. For twenty-five years he gave excellent leadership to the movement and was instrumental in establishing Believers' Churches throughout the Netherlands and Northern Germany. The spreading of Believers' Churches, and their persecution by both Catholics and Protestants, are subjects which would take us beyond the scope of our present concern.

What characterized these new fellowship groups?

An Experiential Faith

A Believers' Church must be composed of individual believers — of people who have experienced God's forgiveness because of personal repentance and faith. The Catholic Church of the Middle Ages had become a creedal church, a sacramental church. The great Reform Councils were primarily concerned with definition of doctrine. Magisterial Protestantism soon lost its new life emphasis and drifted into dogmatism and creedalism. Faith was learned, they claimed, not experienced! Anabaptists emphasized a spiritual renewal, a conversion experience, effected by the Word of God through the Spirit of God. Faith could not be *taught*, it had to be *caught*.

Religious Voluntarism

The Anabaptists rejected all force, every form of coercion, in matters of faith. Harold Grimm describes the Anabaptist concept in these words: "It was Grebel's conception of a free church, consisting of freely committed and practicing believers, as opposed to the *Volkskirche* or inclusive state-church of the Catholics and most Protestants, which formed the basic doctrines of the Anabaptists."⁷ The noted Reformation scholar, Fritz Blanke, also emphasizes this voluntarism: "in Zollikon a new type of church had begun to differentiate itself — the free church type."⁸ For the Anabaptists, compulsory church membership and compulsory baptism enforced by the magistrates was a new form of despotism, and they felt it did not make much difference whether this despotism emanated from Wittenberg or Rome. The Anabaptists were champions of freedom of conscience and

pioneers of religious toleration. (In Europe, Believers' Churches are usually referred to as *free churches* to the present day.)

Practical Biblicism

Walther Koehler, the great Heidelberg historian who expressed the desire to die as a Mennonite, wrote: "The Anabaptists wanted to be Bible Christians, and they were precisely that for the most part."⁹ They appreciated Luther's emphasis on *sola scriptura*, but were disappointed by his application of this principle. According to John Howard Yoder, "To be an Anabaptist meant, in the sixteenth century, to claim that the recourse to Scripture was an authoritative guide for church renewal, to be applied not only to certain evident abuses but even to the basic structure and identity of the Christendom which had been inherited from the centuries before."¹⁰ Their response to the oath, to magistracy and to warfare was rooted here.

True Brotherhood

The priesthood of all believers, the equality of all church members, found a new expression among the Anabaptists. Whereas Luther stressed the idea of pure doctrine (*reine Lehre*), the Anabaptists stressed the concept of the "pure church," which to them meant a New Testament church. This brotherhood concept had implications for church polity. The hierarchy was rejected as unscriptural and a congregational form of church government was adopted. This concept also had implications for the relationship of members to each other. Whereas in Roman Catholicism the terms "brother" and "sister" were applied to members of spiritual orders, Anabaptists applied them to all members.

Radical Discipleship

Harold S. Bender in his presidential address to the American Society of Church History made the claim that for the Anabaptists the essence of Christianity was discipleship.¹¹ For the Anabaptists the life of Christ was the model, or pattern, for the life of the believer. The Cross of Christ had its counterpart in the cross of discipleship. Discipleship for them meant supreme loyalty to Christ, not Caesar! The acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord in all areas of life had revolutionary implications.

Christian Stewardship

For the Anabaptists the church was a brotherhood in which

mutual love and concern for every member were to find clear expression. Luther had alienated the peasants by his lack of concern for their needs. The Swiss Brethren asked their baptismal candidates "whether they would consecrate themselves with all their temporal possessions to the service of God and his people."¹² H. Sailer, a Swiss martyr in 1535, wrote: "I do not believe it wrong that a Christian has property of his own, but yet he is nothing more than a steward."¹³ There is a beautiful blending of evangelism and social concern in the practice of the Anabaptists and this accounts for the dynamics of the movement in the sixteenth century.

Missionary Outreach

The Catholic Church had delegated its missionary responsibility (if it can be called that) to special orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans. Protestantism identified missionary responsibility with vocation. Every Christian had a calling to a station in life (*Waehrstand*, *Wehrstand*, *Lehrstand*). The Anabaptists took the Great Commission seriously, and confronted a christianized society, which in many instances was but a baptized paganism, with the claims of Christ. According to Franklin H. Littell, the Anabaptists were the first, among evangelical Protestants, to make the Great Commission binding upon every believer.¹⁴

We conclude with the words of Rufus M. Jones: "Judged by the principles, which were put into play by the men who bore this reproachful nickname, it must be pronounced as one of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man's eventful religious struggle after the truth."¹⁵ I am grateful to be an heir of this company of the committed. These distinctives also point the way for church renewal today.

ENDNOTES

1 George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962).

2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, IV, 3: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962), p. 681. p. 681.

3 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 185.

4 Quoted by Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967), p. 29.

5 Ibid., p. 34.

6 William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1963), p. 1.

7 Harold Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 266.

8 "Anabaptism and the Reformation," in Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 63.

9 Quoted by John C. Wenger, "The Biblicism of the Anabaptists," in *ibid.*, p. 168.

10 "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology*, Abe J. Klassen, ed. (Fresno, CA: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970), p. 5.

11 "The Anabaptist Vision," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, p. 42.

12 As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 50.

13 Ibid.

14 Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 112.

15 Quoted by Bender in "The Anabaptist Vision," p. 29.

THE COMPANY OF THE COMMITTED *

In the history of the church the question of what constitutes the essence of Christianity has been raised from time to time. The question may be phrased thus: What is the central and all-important reality under which all aspects of faith and life may be subsumed? What is the *Leitmotif* of Christianity? In the history of the church, various aspects have been seen as predominant.

For Roman Catholics the central truth is the sacrament of the Mass. This sacrament delivers man from the penalty of sin — from hell. Security of the soul is the highest good; whether there is renewal of life is quite secondary.

For Lutherans the main concern is to find a righteousness which is acceptable before God. Hence justification is the central doctrine around which all others revolve. The goal is to obtain deliverance from the guilt of sin, and to enjoy forgiveness and peace.

For the Anabaptists the essence of Christianity was the renewal of life in conformity with the image of Christ. When Harold S. Bender presented his classic lecture to the American Society of Church History in 1943 he declared that for the Anabaptists the essence of Christianity was discipleship. Discipleship, he stated, is "first and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision."¹ The goal for Anabaptists was not only deliverance from the penalty of sin (as for Roman Catholics), not only deliverance from the guilt of sin (as for Lutherans), but also deliverance from the servitude to sin.

But, as Lawrence Burkholder has pointed out, discipleship is one of the most ambiguous words of the Christian vocabulary.² Kierkegaard observed in his day that everyone regards himself

* Lecture delivered at the Believers' Church Conference at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas on 12 November 1974.

as a disciple. The popes, St. Francis, James I, and Menno Simons have been upheld as outstanding examples, even though their lives took radically different forms. We need to probe into the meaning of discipleship in Anabaptism.

What is the meaning of discipleship? Bender stated that discipleship "meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ."³ The Anabaptists could not understand how the new life, how salvation, could be made primarily a matter of inner experience, rather than of the transformation of life. They emphasized such passages as Titus 2:11. The focus of the christian life was not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and all human relationships. They would have agreed with the statement of William S. Banowsky, "It is not true that Jesus was interested only in life after death. His message was aimed at life after birth."⁴

In the Anabaptist concept of salvation, faith and following (*Glaube und Nachfolge*) were inseparably linked. They could not separate the work of the cross from the way of the cross. Somehow they felt that the cross of Christ and the cross of the believer were connected. That was also why they rejected the so-called Satisfaction Theory of the atonement (i.e., that Christ fulfilled the moral law for us).

Bonhoeffer lamented that Lutherans (and Protestants in general) had been satisfied with cheap grace, and had left the concept of costly grace and discipleship to Antinomians, Calvinists and Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists were considered radicals primarily because of their insistence on discipleship. This concept often implied the rejection of historical traditions, institutions, and compromises which they regarded as a deviation from Christ's teaching. They ignored the decrees of popes and princes and listened again to him who had spoken with final authority: "Follow Me!" and "But I say unto you." In our discussion we shall consider three aspects of discipleship. A fourth and perhaps the most important aspect, the Anabaptist view of missions, shall be considered separately.⁵

DISCIPLESHIP IMPLIES A WAY OF HOLINESS

Like the New Testament Christians, the Anabaptists were

people of a new way — the way of Christ.

We are all familiar with the immortal words of Hans Denck: "No one can truly know Christ except he follow him in life." Hans Hut maintained: "No one can arrive at the truth except he follow in the footsteps of Christ and His chosen ones in the school of all trial."⁶ If Luther rediscovered the Biblical doctrine of justification, the Anabaptists rediscovered the doctrine of sanctification. Following Christ meant putting away all works of darkness and putting on the new man.

The concern for holiness was related to one of their chief criticisms of magisterial Protestantism. The Anabaptists found no difference in the life-styles of Protestants and Catholics. Drunkenness and immorality were as common among the former as among the latter. Sebastian Franck left the Lutheran Church because no discipline was practiced. Conrad Grebel, founder of the Swiss Brethren, wrote in 1524:

Just as our forbears fell away from the true God and and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of the right faith in him . . . so today too, every man wants to be saved by superficial faith, without fruits of faith, without the baptism of test and probation, without love and hope, without right Christian . . . practices . . .⁷ Did the Anabaptists actually achieve a higher ethic? History answers the question affirmatively.

The concern for holiness was also one of the chief attractions of the new movement. That they actually attained a high quality of life is evident from many testimonies. Bullinger wrote in 1531, "The people were running after them, as though they were living saints."⁸ Sebastian Franck wrote a poem about the four churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Anabaptist) in which he stated his unwillingness to become identified with any, although he was strongly attracted to the Anabaptists because of their love and holiness.

The concept of discipleship as separation from the world and nonconformity to the world found expression in many ways. First, it meant to live detached from the world. The Anabaptists stressed "living loosely" in this world. The images of the pilgrim and the stranger were familiar to them. Christ had no place to lay his head, and for many Anabaptists this was a literal experience. They were willing to forsake all — even to sever family relations — to follow Christ.

Furthermore, discipleship meant the acknowledgment of

Christ's lordship. No human authority, no human relationships, must stand in the way of Christ's command. A disciple could not say, "I have married a wife, therefore, I cannot come!" To believe in Christ, meant to obey Christ. As Bonhoeffer restated it, "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."⁹

Holiness for the Anabaptists did not mean withdrawal into a pietistic shell. The Anabaptists were not "islands of holiness in a sea of despair." They separated from the world for the purpose of penetrating the world.

DISCIPLESHIP IMPLIES THE WAY OF THE CROSS

For Anabaptists, suffering for Christ's sake was not incidental or accidental but an essential aspect of discipleship. To follow Christ meant reproach, opposition, persecution and martyrdom.

Baptism was a baptism unto death. Conrad Grebel said, "Wer den Tauff hat der ist im Tode Christ gepflanzt worden."¹⁰ The Anabaptists found comfort in II Timothy 3:12. With Bonhoeffer they asserted that "when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."¹¹ No religious group in Europe suffered so severely and shed so much martyr's blood in obedience to Christ as the Anabaptists. They were tortured, burned alive, drowned and otherwise martyred by Protestants and Catholics alike. They developed what we might call "a theology of martyrdom." The true people of God have always been persecuted. Throughout the Old Testament (from Abel to Zechariah) and through the New Testament (from Stephen to the martyrs of Revelation) suffering was a mark of true Christianity for them.

Typical of the spirit of cross-bearing discipleship is a letter of Anneken of Rotterdam on the day of her martyrdom:

My son, hear the instruction of your mother; open your ears to the words of my mouth. Behold, I go today the way of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and drink the cup they have drunk. I go, I say, the Way which Jesus Christ . . . Himself went . . ." (and then follows a quotation from Luke 12:50 which was always on their lips).¹²

"Those who proclaim only cheap grace and not the bitter Christ stand corrected by the witness of the Christian martyrs of all ages."¹³

DISCIPLESHIP IMPLIES THE WAY OF NONRESISTANT LOVE

The Anabaptists found in the Sermon on the Mount the doctrine of nonresistance. Christ taught love, not only for one's neighbor, but also for one's enemies (Mt. 5:43, 44). The Anabaptists also found the pattern of this truth in Christ's life and his example. He did not use force but suffering love to achieve his objectives

The Anabaptists were not political pacifists. Their pacifism was limited in scope to the personal life of the Christian and to the corporate life of the church. Their goal was not a warless world but a nonresistant church. They were biblical and historical realists and their pessimistic view of the world and its kingdoms enabled them to escape the pitfalls of a later liberal pacifist movement. Nonresistance was expressed both negatively and positively.

Negatively, nonresistance meant the renunciation of the sword in all its forms. Conrad Grebel taught that "the gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves. . . . Neither do they use worldly sword or war, since all killing has ceased with them."¹⁴ This was in response to Thomas Muentzer who believed in a holy crusade. Pilgram Marpeck, speaking of Matthew 5, said that "all bodily, worldly, carnal, earthly fightings, conflicts, and wars are annulled and abolished among them through such law . . . which law of love Christ . . . Himself observed and thereby gave His followers a pattern to follow after."¹⁵

Menno Simons, in connection with his teaching on the new birth, stated that "regenerated people are the children of peace, who have beaten their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and know war no more . . . spears and swords we leave to those, alas, who regard human blood and swine's blood about alike."¹⁶ The Anabaptists had rediscovered this principle of New Testament discipleship and the practice of the early church. They confessed this principle in a day when Catholicism believed in holy crusades and Protestantism engaged in just wars. It was this rejection of all participation in war and violence that became one of the chief occasions for persecution.

Christian pacifism threatened the whole structure of the *corpus christianum*. Ever since the days of Constantine the church had used the sword for defense and offence. In the sixteenth century the Turks were at the gates of Christian civilization. The

Anabaptists rejected the sword as a means of defense against them.

Positively, nonresistance was manifested by an ethic of love. Anabaptists were not passive in the face of social evil and conflict. They met evil with suffering love and with the cross! They believed that evil could be overcome only in one way — by overcoming it with good (Rom 12:21). They literally practised Christ's teaching: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Early Anabaptist history is replete with illustrations of love in action, even against their enemies. In this ethic of love we have the historical roots of our service programs, especially the ministry of the Mennonite Central Committee. The Anabaptists believed with the songwriter,

For not with swords, loud clashing
Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy
Thy heavenly kingdom comes.

ENDNOTES

1 "The Anabaptist Vision" in Guy F. Hersherberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 42.

2 "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship" in *ibid.*, p. 136.

3 "The Anabaptist Vision," pp. 42-43.

4 William S. Banowsky, *It's a Playboy World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1969), p. 116.

5 See chapter entitled "The Anabaptist Involvement in Missions," below.

6 As quoted in translation by Clarence Bauman, "The Meaning of Christian Discipleship" in *The Church in Mission*, ed. Abe J. Klassen (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), p. 61.

7 Quoted by Bender in "The Anabaptist Vision," p. 38.

8 Quoted by Bender in *ibid.*, p. 31.

9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 6th ed. (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 54.

10 Quoted by Burkholder in "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship," p. 146.

11 *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 76ff.

12 Quoted by Burkholder in "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship," p. 146.

13 Bauman, "The Meaning of Christian Discipleship," p. 62.

14 Lowell H. Zuck, ed., *Christianity and Revolution: Radical Christian Testimonies 1520-1650* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1975), p. 60.

15 As quoted in translation by Bender in "The Anabaptist Vision," p. 51.

16 *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), p. 94.

THE REORIENTATION OF THE TEACHING MINISTRY AT THE CENTENNIAL OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH *

By way of introduction I shall cite two texts of Scripture which call the church of all times to self-examination and reorientation with respect to its teaching and preaching ministry: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock . . ." (Acts 20:28); and the other word of the apostle Paul: "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching . . ." (I Tim. 4:16).

At the time of the origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church one hundred years ago, the widespread collapse of the preaching ministry in the existing churches constituted a principal reason for the secession of the former group. This collapse, moreover, remained the greatest obstacle to a return by the secessionists to the mother church after the rupture. In their Secession Document of 6 January 1860, the "Brethren" lamented the fact that even the teaching ministers "go about and see it, yea even at the celebrations, sit quietly by, seeing and hearing how people serve the Devil!"¹ In their "Memorandum of 23 January 1860", addressed to the Colony Administrative Office, the same complaint emerges. They had much preferred — thus we read in their letter — to remain, each one, in his own congregation, "but because the ministers, as we declared in the document of 6 January, do not act in accordance with the Word of God, we cannot do so for the sake of our conscience."²

The considerable significance of the teaching/preaching ministry for the spiritual health and sound growth of a congregation is clearly implied in the writings of the New Testament.

* *The Voice* 8 (November-December 1959): 1-5, and *The Voice* 9 (January-February 1960): 1-3. Translated by Herbert Giesbrecht. Some revisions were made on the basis of a similar address to the Centennial Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Reedley, California on 13 November 1960 and published in *The Voice* 10 (January-February 1961): 5-6, and 10 (March-April 1961): 3-6.

Of the Church at Jerusalem we read: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). According to Ephesians 4:12, it is the task of the teaching minister "to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up." The author of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts believers to obey their teachers "for they keep watch over you as men who must give account" (Heb. 13:17). A thoroughgoing study of church history makes very plain the fact of a close connection between the spiritual state of a church and the influence exerted by its teaching ministers. The elevation of the ethico-religious life in a brotherhood has been, in most instances, the outcome of its sound teaching ministry. Similarly, spiritual decline and ruin can be traced back to failure among preachers and teachers of the church. These facts compel us to proceed with serious self-examination of our Brotherhood at the occasion of our Centennial.

A good beginning, which affords us joy in reflection, does not guarantee a good culmination. A proper beginning does not even ensure a proper continuation. In order to retain a firm hold on that which has had its beginning among us (Heb. 3:14), it is necessary for us to fight, to strive aright, to watch and pray, and thereby to grow. As early as the end of the first century there existed churches which needed to be earnestly called by the Lord to spiritual reorientation. Evidence of this appears in the letters to the churches at Sardis and Laodicea. Deficiencies in spiritual discernment and in mature self-appraisal were already evident. In this study I propose to draw attention to several areas in which reevaluation and reorientation could result in benefit and blessing for both churches and their teaching ministers. The following considerations do not begin to exhaust the theme before us; they are presented here to evoke further reflection and elaboration.

A REORIENTATION IN RESPECT TO THE UNDERLYING PREMISES OF OUR THEOLOGY

One could describe the theology of our earliest Brethren as a simple "biblicism." The Word of God was, for the fathers of our Brotherhood, the highest authority for both living and teaching. In this respect the earliest Brethren followed Menno Simons whose name they cited five times in their "Document of Secession." Like Menno Simons, these Brethren sought answers to all questions concerning the life of the Christian in the Bible and particularly in the New Testament. They constituted, in the best

sense of the phrase, a "church of radical Bible readers."

What were the essential elements of this radical biblicism of our first Brethren? First, it involved a new understanding of scriptural truth. Through personal study of the Bible and instruction from the Word by committed teachers, they received a deeper understanding of the divine truths of redemption. The continual search for Scriptural support to justify every practice of the church is very evident. It was this attitude towards the Word of God which repeatedly caused them to question prevailing church practice and polity. It is for this reason, too, that the elders, in their statement of 11 March 1860, contended that the error of these "erring members" consisted basically in "that they approach, explain, and apply the Holy Scriptures in a one-sided way. . . ."³

This biblicism of the first Brethren is also reflected in their original Confession of Faith. Creedal and theological formulations were strictly avoided. Instead, their articles of faith consisted mainly of a collection of pertinent Scripture passages.

The sharpest criticism of the seceding Brethren was, however, directed against the actions rather than the doctrine of the mother Church. Thus, it was participation at the communion service and not the Church's teaching of salvation which became the actual occasion for secession. Following Menno Simons, they emphasized the need for Christian discipleship, the necessity of holiness and the need for a pure church.

At the turn of this first century of our history we would send out the watchword: "Back to the faith of our fathers." However, this call does not necessarily imply that we stay within the limits of their *understanding* of the Scriptures. Their understanding, like ours, was a partial one. The Spirit of God can, and must, extend spiritual horizons and enlarge knowledge within our Brotherhood. We stand upon the shoulders of spiritual giants and should, therefore, be in a position to see farther than our forefathers could. Growth in knowledge belongs to the very essence of authentic Christianity.

What, then, is the significance of the above watchword? It signifies a return to the attitude of our fathers towards the Word of God. In 1960 we must seek the answers to all questions pertaining to the Christian life in the Word of God as did our fathers a hundred years ago. We too want to acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures and the finality of the New Testament in regard to all issues of faith and ethics. We do not wish to allow any theological system to rob us of this biblicism!

In retrospect we observe that certain theological movements and influences have threatened our retention of such Anabaptist biblicism. One of these is the influence of Baptist teaching. At the beginning of our history, primarily in the Chortitza Colony but later also in some parts of America, our congregations were affected by a series of contacts with the Baptists. Our congregations gained certain benefits through these contacts, especially in regard to church polity and the principle of brotherhood. Nevertheless, we must assert that their influence upon us has also been harmful. There is, for one thing, the excessive emphasis upon the autonomy of the local congregation. The doctrine of the absolute autonomy of the local congregation is not a part of our Anabaptist legacy nor do we find it among the earliest Brethren. Another negative Baptist influence is the strong emphasis upon a democratic congregational structure. The principle of brotherhood has often been emphasized at the expense of the authority of the teaching ministry.

Darbyism has introduced a second theological influence and has obscured our biblicism. Through Friedrich W. Baedeker and certain other individuals the doctrine of the return of Christ was brought into prominence within our circles. This emphasis has certainly brought some benefits. But at times the Scriptures have been divided and dissected in such a way that the impact of the Word of God as a whole has been lost.

Especially dangerous is Dispensationalism's abdication of responsibility for the evangelization of the world. By an ingenious method of interpretation the missionary responsibility of the church is delegated to the Jews during Christ's millennial reign. Certain portions of the New Testament are assigned to the Jews as, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and other parts that cannot be fitted into the "system." Such an interpretation of Scripture was foreign to the early Anabaptists as well as to our Mennonite Brethren forefathers. It is certainly contrary to the scriptural principle of "rightly handling the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

Calvinism has also influenced us. In its most doctrinaire and pronounced form Calvinism emphasizes the working of God in salvation at the expense of human responsibility. This particular influence has also penetrated parts of the Mennonite Brethren Church from Baptist and Presbyterian theological institutions. Since we as Mennonites manifest a certain inclination towards "works righteousness," the Calvinist emphasis upon the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man has been a needed correc-

tive. Calvinism's one-sided (and unscriptural) doctrine of election has, however, influenced our evangelism efforts negatively. The teaching of eternal security, according to which one separates the preservation of the believer from the conditions for it prescribed in the Scriptures, has exerted unwholesome effects in respect to the life of holiness in some circles. On the basis of this unbiblical doctrine, some lax church members have created a false sense of security for themselves.

A further influence is that of nondenominationalism. This influence, which has been promoted especially by the Bible institute movement in America, has awakened and advanced an interest in missions in some parts of our Brotherhood. This fact we gratefully acknowledge. Nevertheless, we must also call attention to certain dangers. A basic characteristic of this movement is its lack of a biblical conception of the church. Proponents of this movement are content to emphasize the beginnings of the Christian life. One consequence of this lack is a corresponding deficiency in the concept of mission. Evangelism is emphasized at the cost of biblical church growth. The importance of the church in the mission agenda of our Lord is not recognized clearly enough. This movement has exerted harmful influence upon certain congregations in our circles.

Hence we underscore, once again, the watchword: Let us return to the faith of our fathers! Return to their concept of salvation, to their concept of the church, and to their understanding of mission.

A REORIENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR ETHICS

Reorientation in the realm of ethics is as important as reorientation in theology. As we consider this question in the light of the Scriptures and in the light of history it seems that the errors and confusions of the people of God in most instances have ethical implications. Reorientation in this area is not a simple matter since here we are concerned with the relationship of the Christian, who may be in the world but is not of the world, to the society around him.

The protest of 1860 was, to a considerable extent, a protest against the unchristian ethics of some members in the old Church. In their Secession Document, the Brethren lamented the fact that avaricious persons, drunkards and slanderers were permitted to participate in the communion service.⁴

Regrettably, a certain group — the so-called enthusiastic and libertine faction — succeeded in creating much havoc during the earliest years by their false conception of Christian liberty. After the correction of this heretical faction through deeply pious and ethically concerned men like Daniel Fast, Johann Fast, Johann Claassen and Jacob Jantz, an even stronger emphasis upon a strait-laced Christian ethic emerged in the Mennonite Brethren Churches. The closed state of the colonies in Russia as well as the isolation of rural congregations in America during the first fifty years of our history made possible the creation of a public ethical code and the consolidation of brotherhood ethical principles. The world in which our present-day congregations exist and struggle, however, is a world with a rather different shape than the world of a century ago.

The ethical crisis which our Brotherhood is presently suffering is, in part, the result of great historical changes and developments. All of the congregations of our Conference have been influenced, more or less, by *cultural change*. It became necessary, for one thing, to exchange European culture for American culture. In Russia we, as a Mennonite Brotherhood, were surrounded by a less sophisticated Slavic culture with which we had few points of contact. In America, on the other hand, we were thrust into much more intimate contact with an Anglo-Saxon culture which enjoyed a certain elevated status and which, consequently, held more appeal for us. Our congregations have also participated in this country's rapid technological changes. The change from the ox-cart to moon rocket within a period of fifty years represents almost incredible progress. Further change is represented in that only in the last twenty-five years of our hundred-year existence have Mennonite Brethren families had to cope with the presence and problems of television. The retreat from agricultural pursuits and the scurry to larger urban centers is also a part of this cultural change. Our urban congregations must now contend with issues and problems about which we were previously scarcely aware in our rural settings.

Whether we like it or not, we must admit that our congregations are now in the midst of *language change*. The younger generation speaks mostly English, the older generation mostly German. When older and younger members no longer speak the same language, the restraining and regulating influence of the older folk upon the younger generation is gradually lost. The younger members often lose the sense of identity with their past.

This situation intensifies the ethical crisis.

Previously the *choice of vocations* was very narrow in Mennonite circles, and, almost without exception, related to young men. In this area, we must assert the fact of tremendous change. About fifty years ago most of the male members of our churches chose one of three vocations: farming, teaching or carpentry. Today one finds both male and female members of our churches in nearly all of the vocations associated with the modern industrial state. This state of affairs has such far-reaching implications for the ethics of our Brotherhood that we are not yet fully in a position to assess the implications of these changes.

In order to meet the demands and needs created by these new situations we must undergo serious reorientation along ethical lines. What specific tasks, for us as a Brotherhood, are indicated by the above facts?

There is a need to apply ethical principles to new areas of life. One might designate our ethic of the past as an "agricultural ethic." The changed conditions, however, demand an enlargement of the frame of reference. We need to discover a "brotherhood ethic" which is applicable to problems created by our present-day vocations. We need an ethic which provides clear-cut directives for employer and employee. We need a brotherhood ethic which helps us to understand the proper relationship between pastor and congregation. In short, we need an Anabaptist social ethic. We must once again seek the answers to these questions in the Holy Scriptures. Its unchanging principles must be applied to changing circumstances.

There is also a need to establish consensus in our Brotherhood with respect to ethical principles. The collective witness of a church fellowship is greatly strengthened when the individual members of a congregation, and also the various congregations within a conference, "walk by the same rule" and manifest the same mind (see Phil. 3:15-16) also in respect to ethical issues. The fathers of our Brotherhood were agreed, at the very beginning of our history, in their condemnation of smoking. Similarly, they agreed in declining the general use of alcoholic beverages. We owe our fathers a debt of gratitude for taking such a firm stand. Along what lines might we reinforce our witness today by means of unified action?

Finally, there exists a need for instruction in ethical principles. We possess the command of our Master: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). The

apostles taught tirelessly in order to lift the churches of the first century out of the quagmire of a pagan ethic and in order to guide them towards proper Christian discipleship. In this connection it frequently becomes necessary to expose social and moral abuses which occur in the family and in society, to exhort in a pastoral fashion and to reprimand with holy earnestness.

Have we as teaching ministers recognized our great task in this area? The ministering teachers of the church dare not slacken in the struggle towards a pure church which is separate from the world, since a church which conforms to the world has really nothing more to say to it.

REORIENTATION IN RESPECT TO PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH POLITY AND PRACTICE

A church of believers was the ideal of the earliest Anabaptists and also the ideal of our earliest Brethren. It was a living faith, not natural maturity or a certain age, which qualified people for baptism and admission as members to the congregation. We notice a stress upon this truth in the Secession Document: "We confess a baptism on faith as a seal of faith, not on a memorized faith, as is the practise, but on a genuine, loving faith effected by the Spirit of God."⁵ Only those who manifest this kind of "genuine, loving faith" should be admitted to the congregation as members.

What is the situation in our present-day congregations? What do we emphasize when we examine our baptismal candidates? Are we satisfied if the candidate is able to tell us about an "experience"? In the third generation of a Brotherhood it is not particularly difficult for individuals to narrate a conversion story following the example of others without themselves having experienced a personal encounter with God. In his book, *Christianity, Past and Present*, Basil Willey calls our attention to this danger. He discovers that in some cases children possess only the shadow of the religious experiences of their parents. And the third generation then frequently contents itself with only the "shadow of a shadow." The teaching ministers of a church must constantly and earnestly resist the trend towards a weakening of the experience of personal salvation. The elevation of the life of a church must begin with the very entry of members into it. A widening of the entry gate will always result in a widening of the way itself.

Church structure and leadership which are rooted in biblical

conceptions bear far-reaching implications for the wholesome development of church life. In the apostolic churches leadership was exercised by the bishops (overseers) and deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1). In our Mennonite Brethren congregations the church council has, as a rule, consisted of ministers and deacons. Until the earliest years of the twentieth century, we find the office of elder filled in many congregations. The "council of elders" or "church council (board)" consisted of spiritually mature brethren who, on the basis of their spiritual character and endowment, were chosen and appointed for this service. The history of individual congregations reveals that current political structures often provided the model for the polity of the church. In a democracy, the strong temptation persists to shape church polity according to democratic models. The church council tends to become a "cabinet" in which all parts of the overall program of the church must be represented. Surely a reorientation is needed in this area.

Effective administration is no substitute for spiritual supervision and biblical leadership. If church leadership is an administrative function, the congregation loses its character as a spiritual community and sinks to the level of a secular organization. The Lord help us to review this question openly, honestly and in a brotherly fashion, and to seek a solution to it according to guidelines provided in the New Testament.

There is also a need for reorientation in the area of church discipline. The teaching ministry of the old (Mennonite) Church failed precisely in the matter of church discipline. Our earliest Brethren regarded this matter with all seriousness. In the Secession Document this concern is voiced as follows: "Regarding the ban, we confess that all carnal and reprobate sinners must be banned from the fellowship of believers, as Paul states in II Thessalonians 3:14-15."⁶ A church can retain and preserve its spiritual character only if it practices church discipline in a biblical manner. Weak members are to be borne, but not so with wicked persons (cf. I Cor. 5:13; Rev. 2:2). The repentant brother is to be forgiven, the persistently wicked one is excluded from the fellowship.

There exists, indeed, a "tolerance unto death." If one tolerates false teachers and sinful living in the congregation, the congregation gradually suffers spiritual decline and ruin. This fact highlights the great responsibility which confronts our teaching ministry. A failure in our present task would be as tragic as the failure experienced in this area one hundred years

REORIENTATION IN RESPECT TO RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVANGELISM

The origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860 might be viewed as the fruit and consequence of extended efforts in evangelism. The "brotherhood groups" in Ohrloff and Gnadenfeld carried much illumination and evangelical truth into the older congregations. It was, however, the Spirit-filled and evangelistic messages of Pfarrer Wuest which the Lord used in a singular way to awaken many from their spiritual torpor. The new Church, born in the very midst of evangelism, manifested serious concern about the salvation of the unconverted. The expansion and growth of the church occurred in response to the clear and powerful witness of brethren and sisters who had experienced personal salvation, and who had received a sense of personal assurance and joy. It may be noted here that no preacher or evangelist is to be found among the founding fathers of our Church. Yet one could justly describe these earliest Brethren in these words: "those who were scattered went about preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4). The entire Church possessed a readiness of spirit for evangelism and witness to the unconverted. At the first General Conference in 1872, in Andreasfeld in the Chortitza Colony, a committee was elected specifically for the purpose of conducting itinerant preaching ministries. A deep love for the Lord and for the lost characterized our earliest Brethren.

We need to challenge one another to reorientation in several aspects of evangelism.

First, in view of our historical origins, we lament our present-day slackening in the practice of personal witnessing. We have altogether too many silent church members and even church workers. Our forefathers were rather weak in organizing larger, common ministries, but they were vigorous in personal witness. The unconverted in the community feared such confident witnesses to salvation. This kind of fear has, to a large extent, disappeared among us. God grant us a spiritual revival and a strong sense of responsibility for personal witness.

We lament also the lack of a persistent emphasis upon evangelistic concern and activity. In some of our congregations we restrict ourselves to two-week periods in the year, during which periods the entire responsibility of evangelism is some-

how to be discharged. Of the first Church in Jerusalem we read: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). The same thing might also be said of the first Mennonite Brethren congregations.

But we must take account of the tremendous economic and social changes which have occurred around us which affect evangelism. Changes in circumstances also call for changes in method in our work, though not for changes in principle. With regard to method the church needs always to be guided by the apostle Paul's basic approach: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22b). As a Brotherhood, we need to be guided by the Lord in the search for new methods by which we might extend the gospel more effectively in our day.

The realm of our evangelism also requires reorientation. During his brief sojourn in the Samaritan town of Sychar the Lord Jesus challenged his disciples with these meaningful words: "Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (John 4:35). The Lord needs to grant to his church a vision for the "field of Samaria" time and time again. As Mennonite Brethren Church we have a relatively extensive program in missions abroad. Our mission program at home, however, is rather feeble. The very names of our baptismal candidates provide proof that our efforts in evangelism have occurred within rather narrow limits. In some cases the concern in these efforts is largely restricted to the children of our own church members. It is to be deplored that we are unable to reach even most of our own children for the Lord and his church. This scope of evangelism is, however, too limited; we must extend its boundaries. In view of biblical principles and in view of the historical experience of some religious communities it would seem to me that our Brotherhood bears a special responsibility towards certain ethnic groups. Our privilege constitutes the ground for our responsibility. Our European background, and especially our mastery (or at least possession) of the German language, render it easier for us to establish contact with many German-speaking individuals in Canada who have never heard a clear witness to the gospel. Here is a large but neglected field. May the Lord expand and also deepen our interest in such a mission.

A reorientation alone is insufficient but it does constitute a first step towards renewal of the church. "Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent" (Rev. 3:3). We

need to reach the stage of deep inner repentance and renewal in respect to our spiritual lives. Let us, as entire Brotherhood, join in the prayer of Habakkuk: "In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known" (Hab. 3:2). May the Lord grant us a new vision in 1960, as He once extended it to our fathers in 1860.

ENDNOTES

1 Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. and ed. John B. Toews et al (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), p. 230.

2 Ibid., p. 234.

3 Ibid., p. 236.

4 Ibid., cf. p. 231.

5 Ibid., P. 231.

6 Ibid., p. 232.

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY *

Mennonite Brethren are experiencing an identity crisis unprecedented in their history. Questions such as "who are we?" and "what are we?" are surfacing in private and public discussions. The recent debate in our periodicals about the change of our denominational name is perhaps the clearest symptom of this crisis.

The problem of identity is partly inherent in the origin and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church. If it is true that the early Mennonite Brethren were "Mennonite in doctrine, Pietistic in spirit, and Baptist in organization,"¹ an identity crisis could be expected sooner or later.

Abraham Unger, leader of the Chortitza Mennonite Brethren, precipitated such a crisis in his own church and constituency with his pro-Baptist leanings. Under his successor, Aron Lepp, the Chortitza Mennonite Brethren Church re-established its identity in conformity with the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren as an evangelical Anabaptist-Mennonite body.

In the Document of Secession the Brethren established their identity as "Mennonites" beyond any question or doubt. According to Cornelius Krahn,

... the new movement consciously felt itself related to 16th century Anabaptism. It did not want to be Pietistic, nor Baptist, but rather Mennonite. It wanted to be and remain historical, consistent Mennonitism, a pure Mennonitism that was based not upon birth, but upon rebirth.²

Although the identity problem at that time was resolved within the Mennonite Brethren Church, the question whether the Brethren were Mennonites or Baptists was raised again and

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 10 March 1972, pp. 2-4, 25.

again by leaders of the Mennonite Church and by government officials, and this controversy blurred the image of the new church for several decades. In an article entitled "The Early Mennonite Brethren Church: Baptist or Anabaptist," Frank C. Peters traces the historical development of this debate in Russia as well as in the United States and shows how the Brethren by their confessional documents refuted the allegations that they were Baptists. Peters concludes his study with the following observations:

(1) The early Mennonite Brethren were definite in their desire to remain Anabaptist in their confessions. Every attempt was made to declare themselves in harmony with the basic tenets as set forth by Menno Simons.

(2) The radical advances toward affiliation with the Baptists were made by isolated individuals who failed to receive the support of the Brotherhood.

(3) It seems rather clear that the Mennonite Brethren revival was meant to be a return to the Anabaptist vision rather than a deviation from it. The desire to build a community of believers who had personally committed themselves to follow Jesus Christ, and who were willing to live a separated life of holiness, was certainly in keeping with what the Anabaptist forefathers felt was the New Testament pattern for a believers' church.³

The issues have changed somewhat during the last fifty years, and so have Mennonite Brethren attitudes. Today we are in tension not only with evangelical Protestantism but also with the larger segment of present-day Mennonitism. Rudy Wiebe expressed the dilemma of many in our younger generation when he wrote: "I can only say that for me, looking into the seventies, the meaning of Mennonite Brethren is to be confused."⁴ In this paper I would like to indicate the serious nature of our identity crisis, to discuss briefly some underlying causes and to conclude by suggesting some possible remedies.

GROWING POLARIZATION

It appears to me that we are drifting towards a polarization in theology and ethics in our Conference.

In spite of our merger of "missions" and "welfare" on a General Conference level, and the linking of spiritual and social concerns on the Canadian Conference level, we have not suc-

ceeded in integrating these concerns and in uniting our Brotherhood. We have our "left wing" which is concerned about social action, about relief and services, as symbolized and expressed by the MCC. This group, which is often spearheaded by teachers and students in our churches, would like to have a stronger witness for peace and social justice even though this may demand non-conventional methods of expression. The brethren who stand for these concerns usually favor a closer cooperation with the other Mennonite conferences with whom we share these concerns.

The "right wing" elements would like to restrict our concerns to evangelism and missions in the traditional sense. According to Elmer Martens, we have brethren in our midst who have an "inner urge to align ourselves with other groups — the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Billy Graham, Campus Crusade, the Baptists."⁵ They usually look with suspicion upon cooperation with Mennonite Central Committee or fellowship in the Mennonite World Conference, but have no scruples to identify themselves with pedobaptists and militarists in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada or the National Association of Evangelicals. This polarization of views not only produces tensions within our Brotherhood but also destroys our ability to unite for a powerful thrust in a common purpose as evangelical Anabaptists and may eventually lead to a complete disruption in our Brotherhood.

A diagnosis of this nature is always a hazardous undertaking, and I make no pretense that the following list of possible causes is either exhaustive or adequate.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

A lack of an historic self-consciousness

A church without a past will soon be a church without a future. In our circles there is woeful ignorance with respect to our past history, as Mennonite Brethren and as a part of the larger Anabaptist movement. Our emphasis on "existential Christianity" is cutting us off from our historic roots. Such wilful ignorance and deliberate rejection of our past leads to spiritual impoverishment and complete loss of identity.

In this connection it is significant to note how Israel's religious identity was preserved by the constant efforts of the prophets to remind them of their past. God's people were told again and again that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the

God who had brought them out of Egyptian bondage, who was manifesting himself in their contemporary history. It is often people with little or no knowledge of their own spiritual heritage who will suggest a change of name as the solution to our problems.

But, as Victor Doerksen aptly points out, "We cannot slough off our history by changing our name; we can only add a potentially murky chapter by such an action."⁶ It is rather interesting that in two countries of the Third World, in Japan and in the Paraguayan Chaco, conferences composed of our younger churches have recently changed their name to Mennonite Brethren. This change came about as a result of a growing awareness of our historical role and mission as a Mennonite Brethren Church.

Exposure to "foreign" theological influences

Our present identity crisis is largely the result of our exposure to "every wind of doctrine" from various theological schools of thought. Our problem is perhaps not so much one of exposure to various theological views as our indiscriminate acceptance of them.

In our Sunday schools, where the foundation should be laid for a wholesome spiritual identity, we reject materials with a distinctive Anabaptist orientation, and accept the lessons from Scripture Press with their occasional overtones of American patriotism and militarism. In our Bible schools we have been influenced by hyper-dispensationalism and hyper-Calvinism which some of the earlier teachers had absorbed at certain non-Mennonite Bible institutes. The Scofield Bible, moreover, played an important role in shaping the theology of our schools in the thirties and forties. Through the graduates of these schools these views were carried into the pulpits and pews of our churches.

The religious literary diet in our homes has also contributed to a loss of our identity. The *Moody Monthly* and *Decision* magazines are often read more eagerly than our denominational periodicals. The influence of certain radio programs in distorting and destroying the Anabaptist vision can hardly be overestimated. I have been shocked by reports that even the "Twentieth Century Reformation Hour" enjoys a degree of popularity in some Mennonite Brethren homes. But we need not move to the far right in American Protestantism to discover a blending of evangelicalism with patriotism and militarism.

Some sixty years ago Peter M. Friesen was already disturbed

by this readiness of Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren to sell their spiritual birthright so easily and cheaply. His observations are applicable to our time:

I am tired, tired of the foreign influences and would like to urge all reformers ("old" Mennonite and Brethren), stand still for a moment, and ask yourselves this question from the perspective of church history: — What is Mennonitism? Have we perhaps forgotten to relearn that which was good, as a balance to the endless new, new, new? Are we not losing a large and essential part of our Mennonite framework in the good sense? What does God want of us as a fellowship? That we, while calling ourselves Mennonite, become a conglomerate of Lutheranism, Baptist, and Plymouthism, etc.? (We mean in the understanding and the manner of expressing our Christianity.) What is the specific direction that God has assigned to us through our original doctrines, history and present situation? Certainly we should now more seriously begin to study our own background, examine the newly-acquired for its values, throw away the ballast and deliberately bring the good old and the good new . . . into a proper relationship.⁷

Desire to identify with popular evangelicalism

In the past, cultural and linguistic barriers functioned as props in the preservation of our religious identity. With our almost complete acculturation during the last two decades these props have been swept away. No longer do a peculiar ethnic culture and the German language reinforce our identity. A corollary of this change appears to be the desire to shake off the feelings of inferiority which have often plagued us as a minority group. Since Mennonite Brethren are "making it," as Rudy Wiebe observes, "in the burgeoning North American world of business, politics, education, the arts,"⁸ they are reluctant to identify themselves with a Mennonite-Anabaptist position which, even though this is done on a New Testament basis, has emphasized nonconformity to the world and nonresistance to evil.

Mennonite Brethren have become a part of the affluent society, and this fact plays a major role in our identity crisis. The desire to be "with it," and the attraction of mainstream evangel-

icalism with its respectability and popularity in state and society, are important factors in losing our vision and our identity. If present trends continue, the Mennonite Brethren may drift into what Franklin H. Littell has called "Protestant nativism." It is a matter of historical record that the Dutch Mennonites lost their spiritual identity in the 18th century largely as a result of their growing prosperity and their complete identification with the cultural and political life of their nation.

MISSION NOT OVER

There are those who would recommend a complete identification with other evangelicals to resolve our tensions. This would involve not only a change of name but a surrender of our Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives. There are others who would favor a complete merger with other Mennonite bodies as a solution to our problem. Both solutions are unacceptable to me at this point because I am not yet prepared to accept the view of a retired Mennonite (Allianz?) leader whom Rudy Wiebe interviewed in Paraguay and who expressed himself in this way: "The time for the MB Church may be over; it has served the purposes for which it came into existence. It's three generations now."⁹

Since I believe that our distinctive mission as a Mennonite Brethren Church is not completed, I have the following suggestions for clarifying our vision and strengthening our witness:

1. We must strengthen our ties with the other Anabaptist-Mennonite bodies, with whom we share not only a common spiritual heritage but also a common contemporary concern in both missions and services. We are indebted to these larger Mennonite conferences for helping us to rediscover basic aspects of the Anabaptist vision, namely, Christian discipleship, mutual aid, and the love ethic which finds expression in nonresistance and in a positive peace witness. We have made our greatest impact and contribution to the work of the kingdom in this association of the larger Mennonite fellowship. A severance, or even a weakening, of these ties will eventually lead to loss of identity and loss of a distinctive witness. Here too we should learn from history. The United Missionary Church (Mennonite Brethren in Christ until 1947) has gradually severed its relations with the other Mennonites (as, for instance, in MCC), and "traditional Mennonite distinctive principles and practices . . . such as non-resistance and nonconformity have gradually received less em-

phasis, and the decision in 1947 . . . to drop the name 'Mennonite' is an index of a substantial move away from the historic Mennonite anchorage."¹⁰

2. We must be selective in our involvement and identification with other evangelicals. We have profitted in many ways in the past from our association with non-Mennonite evangelicals. In our early history we received stimulation and guidance from German Baptists and Pietists. This association with other evangelicals throughout our history has challenged us to greater zeal and commitment in the area of evangelism and missions. We can also be a blessing to them by sharing with them our understanding of Christian discipleship and the nature of the church as a Brotherhood.

But we must learn to borrow from them with much greater discernment and discrimination. Whatever we borrow from other theological traditions must be consciously integrated into our understanding of the New Testament church and of Christian discipleship.

As we consciously counteract the underlying causes that undermine our spiritual identity and as we continue to strengthen and maintain the relations indicated above, we will reestablish our identity and project a more positive image as an evangelical Anabaptist-Mennonite body of believers.

ENDNOTES

1 Gerhard Wilhelm Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: The Board of Foreign Missions, Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1952), p. 33.

2 "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites of Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 9 (October 1935): 173.

3 *Mennonite Life*, October 1959, p. 178.

4 "The Meaning of Being Mennonite Brethren," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 17 April 1970, p. 3.

5 "Mennonite Brethren: Does the Name Fit?" *Christian Living*, September 1970, p. 9.

6 Letter to the Editor, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 22 October 1971, p. 24.

7 As quoted in translation by Abram J. Klassen in "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914" (M.A. thesis, Wheaton College, 1966), p. 163.

8 "The Meaning of Being Mennonite Brethren," p. 4.

9 Ibid.

10 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church."

THE STORY BEHIND THE HISTORY *

Writing about the brotherhood to which one belongs and in which one has actively participated creates special problems which are probably not encountered by the historian who writes about early Greek architecture or about some aspect of the papacy of the Middle Ages. During my research and writing, the truth of James 3:1 often came to mind, a truth which is applicable to writers as well as to teachers: ". . . for you know, that we who teach (or write!) shall be judged with greater strictness."

Before I discuss some of the problems I faced, it might be appropriate to raise the question whether another history of the Mennonite Brethren Church was needed at this time. A little less than twenty-five years ago John H. Lohrenz wrote *The Mennonite Brethren Church*, and just twenty years ago (1954) Abraham H. Unruh's *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde* was published. Why another book at this time?

One obvious reason is that the history of the Mennonite Brethren needed to be updated, especially since the post-war period (since 1945) has been one of dynamic growth and change in our North American brotherhood. Moreover, Unruh's German version of the story is not readily accessible to the younger generation nor to non-German people coming into our congregations.

Another and more important reason must be added. Although the sources of historical material have remained basically unchanged, the questions asked of these sources vary from generation to generation. In his introduction to *The Western Experience*, Eugene Rice observes: "Historical writing is in constant flux because historians ask their sources questions newly shaped by changing social and cultural needs."¹ It is precisely

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 4 April 1975, pp. 1-4.

these "changing social and cultural needs" of the last three decades which called for a new analysis of the old (as well as new) sources.

WRITE THE TRUTH

Objectivity in historiography is an ideal that is hard to attain and perhaps even harder to maintain. Objectivity does not mean that the historian should be without personal convictions or commitment to a clearly defined world view. But he must have a conscious awareness of his intellectual biases and limitations and make every effort to transcend these by drawing upon all available sources and viewpoints.

Various pressures may tend to weaken or distort objectivity. Peter M. Friesen says that when he began his work of research and writing he was approached by a church member who suggested that he write a history which would be an apology for the new movement and which would prove conclusively the "rightness" of the Mennonite Brethren. Friesen categorically rejected such a partisan approach. Very sound advice was given to him by the aging Jacob Reimer, one of the founding fathers of the new church: "Write the truth, good and evil, as the Bible about David." This, Friesen observes, was "right, but oh how difficult!"² On the basis of my limited experience I find it easy to share in this confession.

One area in which an objective analysis is of crucial significance is the treatment of the underlying cause of events that led to the "secession" of 1860. Here, I am inclined to believe, my general knowledge of Anabaptist-Mennonite history has helped me. From such an historical perspective, the charges made by the Brethren in the Document of Secession were too sweeping and too severe. The best proof for this assertion is the fact that the renewal movement in the "old" church continued after the new church was established.

Another problem which called for an impartial and objective approach was the relationship of the two major conferences involved in this history, the United States and the Canadian area conferences. Since I am a Canadian, I became especially grateful for my years of residence and study in the United States — at Tabor College where I learned to know our Brotherhood and its leadership in the South, and later in graduate work at the University of Minnesota. I consider it providential also that I was invited to do my research and writing at our Seminary and

on the adjoining campus of Fresno Pacific College in Fresno, California. There I had the privilege to share my findings and test my views with brethren who had a better knowledge of the United States constituency than I had. The committee of readers composed of brethren from Winnipeg, Hillsboro, and Fresno also gave helpful suggestions, enabling me to see things in proper historical perspective.

Although I have seriously endeavored to follow the principles of historical objectivity (or, to use Benjamin J. Unruh's phrase, *historische Sauberkeit*), I realize that the ideal may not always have been attained. I have written this history with a loving concern for the brotherhood and with a deep appreciation for its spiritual heritage.

WHAT GOES IN?

Historical writing is selective writing. Not all that has happened can (or should!) be recorded. This process of selection is much more difficult than it may appear at first glance. Only the constant exercise of severe self-discipline, guided by commitment to specific objectives, will prevent the historian from following interesting bypaths which his research may provide. The discipline to which I had been subjected in working on several dissertations helped me to avoid some of the usual pitfalls.

The selection of material was partly determined by the scope of the book. A committee of consultants which met for orientation and brainstorming in the early days of my work in Fresno had agreed that the book should deal primarily with the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North America, but that it should also describe the European antecedents. This meant that the first part had to be limited to about 100 pages, whereas Peter M. Friesen gives this story in 776 pages, and A.H. Unruh devotes 410 pages to the European background.

The selection was also governed by the level of treatment. In its corporate life, our Brotherhood operates on various levels — the local congregational level, the provincial or district conference level, the area conference level (United States and Canada), and the general conference level. The consultation committee agreed that the scope and purpose of the book would not permit the treatment of developments on a local church level.

Although most local congregations in the North American constituency have been mentioned, I have generally described in

greater detail only those churches which served as centers of organization and expansion. The Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church, for instance, has been given fuller treatment than any other church in Canada because it was the first Mennonite Brethren Church established in this country. Special consideration was also given to local developments which were significant for the larger Brotherhood.

The above guidelines were applied in including brief biographical sketches of certain leaders. Many more should have received "honorable mention," but within the limited scope of the book this was impossible. Those whose ministry has been described in some detail must be considered as representative of the larger "company of the committed" in our Brotherhood, past and present. Those still active in the arena of conference ministries have, for obvious reasons, been largely excluded.

GERMAN SOURCES

The primary sources of Mennonite Brethren history in Russia as well as in early America are all in German. At present the Historical Commission of our General Conference is making arrangements for the translation of P.M. Friesen's *magnum opus*. If successful, this work will constitute the best primary source available to English readers.

Up to World War II most conference minutes on the area and general conference levels were recorded in the German language. This also applies to periodicals such as the *Zionsbote*, the *Friedensstimme*, the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (still being published in German), and the *Konferenz-Jugendblatt*. This meant that I had to work with German sources in preparing the major part of the manuscript.

Proper translation requires more than a thorough knowledge of the language from which the translation is to be made. To know the etymology of a word or its dictionary meaning is not enough. Words receive their meaning through usage in a given historical and cultural context. Hence a knowledge of that particular history and culture is essential for making correct translations.

For example, how does one translate the term *Fuersorgekomitee* when used of a government-appointed committee with administrative and judiciary powers over the affairs of foreign settlers in the Ukraine? In an otherwise respectable translation of an historic document I found that the term had been rendered as

"Committee of Reference and Counsel" — the term we use in our conference for an elected body of church leaders and for which the German equivalent has been *Fuersorgekomitee*. However, this rendering does not at all describe the nature and function of the group of government officials in Odessa. In the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Cornelius Krahn translates the term as "Guardians Committee."³ I found this translation somewhat inadequate. The *Fuersorgekomitee's* function was not merely to "guard" but to supervise the administration of the colonies. Moreover, it was really not a "committee." Members of a committee are usually responsible to the people who have elected them. Members of a "commission" are generally responsible to the officials who appointed them. Hence I have translated the term as "Supervisory Commission."

And what about *Froehliche Richtung*? How does one properly describe the movement that was characterized by excessive emotionalism, fanaticism and a false sense of freedom? To render it as "happy movement" misses the mark; to call it the "enthusiastic movement" is also unsatisfactory. I began describing it as the "joyous or hilarious movement" but "exuberant movement" would probably have been better. Perhaps it would have been best to call it *Froehliche Richtung* throughout, with a comprehensive paraphrase or explanation inserted after its first occurrence. Similar problems were encountered in the translation of many other idiomatic terms.

ON BALANCE

A leading Canadian evangelist stated some time ago that the hardest thing in life is to keep a proper balance. To maintain a proper balance of emphases is also extremely difficult for church historians. In F. Oehninger's *Geschichte des Christentums*, published in 1897, the expansion of Christianity on the North American continent is barely mentioned! We have also seen standard works on the Reformation in which the Anabaptist movement is given the status of a footnote! Historians must resist the temptation to ride their hobby horses or to yield to the pressures of special interest groups.

One balance which I diligently sought to maintain was the balance between the two area conferences. Much has happened in both Canada and the United States during this past century (1874-1974). Relatively speaking, much more happened in the United States during the first half of this century than in Canada.

Hence, early Mennonite Brethren history on this continent centers largely in the United States.

As a result of the large-scale emigration from Russia in the 1920's the Canadian Conference began to grow rapidly and by 1951 the membership of the Canadian Conference has surpassed that of the United States Conference, and a new "balance" emerged. The establishment of churches in rapid succession and the proliferation of institutions made it extremely difficult to assign equal space to both areas. On this point I beg the reader's indulgence.

Another aspect of the problem of balance I constantly faced was in connection with the various phases of conference work. Should publications, for instance, be given more space and strong emphasis? And should music be incorporated into the chapter on "The Ministry of the Church" or be given a separate chapter? I decided in favor of the latter approach.

The space devoted to various institutions and agencies depended to a large extent on the level of their administration and operation. Institutions administered by area conferences were given fuller treatment than Bible schools and Christian high schools operated by provincial or district conferences or societies.

I fear that many leaders involved in Conference work will be disappointed when they leaf through the book and discover that their particular institution, organization, or ministry has been given scanty treatment. I trust the reader will remember that the book's purpose is to present a balanced account of the church's faith, life, and work in broad outline. How well I have succeeded in "seeing the whole and seeing it steadily," I leave to the judgment of the reader and to the verdict of history.

WHICH STANCE?

My interpretive stance with regard to the real meaning of 1860 and to the theological issues which have arisen in the course of our history is reflected throughout the book. In the chapter "Understanding Biblical Revelation" I have explicitly stated my views (based on the confessional and historical documents available) about the religious influences that have shaped Mennonite Brethren theology and ethics. It will perhaps be helpful to draw attention to two major perspectives in my interpretive stance.

In the first place, I consider the emergence of the new church in 1860 to be primarily the result of the "Great Awakening" of

the 1850's. In other words, it was a *new life movement*. Through the study of the Word and the preaching of Pfarrer Wuest, many people came to a personal and experiential faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. This primary and basic fact of a genuine spiritual renewal must not be obscured by considerations of secondary influences in the origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

This stance implies that we reject the so-called socio-economic theory of the origin of the Mennonite Brethren, which claims that the religious protest of the early Brethren was merely an extension of their economic problems. I think I have shown rather conclusively that the new movement did not have its adherents "chiefly in the lower strata of society," but that many of them were landowners and well-to-do businessmen.

In the second place, I consider the new movement basically an Anabaptist-Mennonite movement. I do not question the great influence of German Pietism on the new life movement, but in their confessional documents the early Brethren repeatedly identify with the teachings of Menno Simons. I believe Krahn is correct in the following observation: "It did not want to be Pietistic, nor Baptist, but rather Mennonite. It wanted to be and remain historical, consistent Mennonitism, a pure Mennonitism that was based not upon birth, but upon rebirth."⁴

Pietism revived the early Anabaptist emphasis on personal faith and commitment but it lacked the concept of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a concept which it has not abandoned in Germany (with some exceptions) to the present day. The believers who remained in the old church were probably more in conformity with pietistic tradition than those who seceded. The concept of a believers' church of the early Brethren was a recovery of the Anabaptist vision.

The Mennonite Brethren movement was also not a Baptist movement. In the areas of church polity and church administration the Brethren received valuable help from the Baptists. But confessionally as well as organizationally they never identified with the Baptists, even though they maintained cordial relations with them both in Russia and, later, in America.

In concluding my "reflections," I would like to state that to bring a history up-to-date is always a hazardous undertaking since it involves references to people who are still active in the conference and to institutions and movements which are still in the process of becoming.

The recent past will have to await a more objective and definitive appraisal by future historians. Hence the opinions

I have expressed about contemporary trends and developments must be regarded as provisional. And, finally, there are many aspects even of our past history which call for further study.

ENDNOTES

1 Mortimer Chambers, *The Western Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. xvi.

2 Peter M. Frijsen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. and ed. J.B. Toews, et al (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

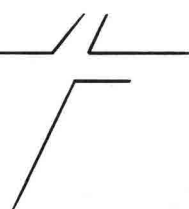
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Part Three

Peace and Nonresistance:

Crucial Issues for the Church



TRUE NONRESISTANCE — A MATTER OF DISCIPLESHIP *

After World War II, I met a fine young Christian who was also a brilliant student (a gold medal winner), on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. In our conversation I discovered that although he had no connection with any of the historic peace churches, he had served as a conscientious objector during the War. When I asked for the basis of his convictions, he replied, "Is there any alternative for one who takes Christ's teaching and example seriously?"

We agree that for those who take Christ seriously there is no alternative. Nonresistance is primarily a matter of Christian discipleship. In the Gospels, faith in Christ is inseparably linked with *Nachfolge* (following Christ). The way of the Cross cannot be separated from the *work* of the Cross. If Christ taught and practiced nonresistance, then the matter should be settled for his followers — once and for all.

In 1896 Charles M. Sheldon read his fascinating story-sermon to his congregation in Topeka, Kansas. This story, which was later published under the title, *In His Steps*, is concerned with the answer to the crucial question: What would Jesus do? The author makes an attempt to show that the ethic of Jesus is relevant to all areas of life in contemporary society.

Is Sheldon's question a legitimate question for the follower of Christ? The apostles answer it with a strong affirmative. Peter writes: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (I Peter 2:21). John writes: "He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (I John 2:6). Paul writes: "Have this mind among yourselves,

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 19 March 1965, pp. 8, 18; 19 February 1965, pp. 8-9; 24 September 1965, p. 6.

which you have in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The true follower of Christ is under solemn obligation to follow Christ both in his teaching and in his life. This article focuses attention on aspects of Christ's teaching related to the treatment of enemies which we are to heed and practise.

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO ENEMIES

The use of the plural in Matt. 5:44 ("love *your* enemies; pray for those who persecute *you*") implies inter-group relationships as well as inter-personal relationships.

Christ's teaching on nonresistance to evil (on a physical level) is clear and unequivocal. In fact, Christ's teaching on this matter is so clear that even such men as Leo Tolstoi and Mahatma K. Gandhi, who were not prepared to accept the total Christian gospel, found the basis for their pacifism in Christ's teaching.

The true Christian accepts the finality of Christ's teaching on all matters of faith and conduct. He gives heed to the voice from heaven which said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to him*" (Matt. 17:5).

According to our Lord's teaching we are to *love our enemies* (Matt. 5:44). The Jew had always taken seriously the command: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:18). But the Jew identified his neighbor with his fellow Jews since the command was not to avenge or bear grudge against "the children of one's people." And while there is no specific command in the Old Testament to hate one's enemy, it seemed a legitimate inference for Jewish nationalists. Christ, in the above passage (Matt. 5:44), enlarges and redefines the term "neighbor." Even our enemies, Christ teaches, are included in the term "neighbor." This meant that the despised Samaritans and the hated Romans were also to be loved! It is obvious that such teaching makes it impossible for any follower of Christ to be a radical segregationist or a patriotic nationalist. "The whole witness of the New Testament," according to Culbert G. Rutenber, "is to a universal responsibility that embraces the whole of mankind."¹

How can this love for all men be reconciled with the spirit of war? Blaise Pascal, French theologian and philosopher, has described war in these graphic words: "War is hatred and murder, war is anguish and death. War is lie and deception; war laughs at divine law and tramples human law under foot."² During the Korean War a high-ranking officer of the Allied armies declared: "We must learn to hate our enemies more and more." According

to the teaching of Christ, such hate is equivalent to killing and murder (Matt. 5:21, 22). Is it possible for the Christian, who has the redemptive love of God in his heart, to take part in the destruction of life? No elaborate theological arguments in support of the so-called "just war," and in favor of unconditional obedience to the state, will appear very convincing in the light of this clear imperative of Christian discipleship.

According to Christ's teaching we are also to *pray for our enemies* (Matt. 5:44). In Isaiah 53:12 the Messiah is portrayed as the one who shall make "intercession for the transgressors." This prophecy found fulfilment in the life of our Lord (Luke 23:34). He taught his followers to pray for those "which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Prayer is the Christian's "first line of defence." Prayer changes not only things but also the hearts of men. Love for our enemies finds its practical expression in prayer for our enemies. Should not our prayers of intercession also include the Communists of Russia and China and the Viet Cong of Vietnam?

Christ also teaches us to *forgive our enemies*. Our Lord has taught us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). When Peter asked the Master how often he should forgive, the Lord replied: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). Forgiveness is the central and fundamental truth of the gospel. We can now forgive all men because God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. Love for our enemies finds its highest and noblest expression in forgiveness. The nations of the world believe that the law of retribution is necessary for the maintenance of peace and justice. Christians know, however, that true peace and righteousness can be established only when the higher law of divine forgiveness is operative. Missionaries have proven the effectiveness of forgiveness in disarming their enemies. The widows and relatives of the five gallant martyrs among the Aucas of Ecuador have given to us a modern demonstration of this principle. Our missionaries among the Moros of the Paraguayan Chaco have also shown that love and forgiveness are powerful means in the conquest of enemy territory.

Finally, Christ has taught us to *do good to our enemies* (Matt. 5:44). "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor" (Rom. 13:10), or, to use the paraphrase of Phillips, "love hurts nobody." Already in the Old Testament this truth finds forceful expression in Prov. 25:21, 22: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals

of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." In his ministry Christ made no distinction in his well-doing between Jews and Gentiles, friends and enemies. He not only raised the son of the widow at Nain, but also restored the centurion's son to health. He taught his disciples to display the attitude of the heavenly Father, who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Christ's teaching on turning the other cheek, on surrendering one's cloak, and on going the second mile all imply that the Christian's supreme weapon in overcoming evil is that of deeds of love and mercy. Christ's teaching makes no provision for participation in armed combat against the nation's enemies.

NONRESISTANCE OR PACIFISM?

Incrimination by association was the method used by the late Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy to ruin his political opponents. Unfortunately, "McCarthyism" also appears in Christian circles. A man or a cause is sometimes denounced simply because he holds a view in common with some movement which is not evangelical in character. Biblical nonresistance has often suffered because it has been associated with certain types of non-Christian pacifism. Since many liberal theologians have subscribed to some form of pacifism, the inference seems clear and conclusive: pacifists are modernist; therefore evangelical Christians must dissociate themselves from such teaching. There are also many radical socialists who have espoused some pacifist principles through the years. Again, the inference seems legitimate and proper: pacifists are Communists (why should one distinguish between Communists and socialists?) and therefore true Christians cannot accept such views. The baby is thrown out with the bath water. On the basis of such logic one could also reject baptism by immersion because Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons practice it.

Both terms, nonresistance and pacifism, have biblical roots. The former is based on Matt. 5:39: "That ye resist not evil" The latter is based on the Latin version of Matt. 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers," *pax* being the Latin word for "peace." In the course of time, however, the term pacifism has taken on a connotation which does not reflect the teaching of Scripture; hence it must be qualified by the word "Christian" to avoid confusion. Don E. Smucker and Charles E. Raven have both entitled their books, *The Theological Basis of Christian Pacifism*. Thus qualified,

pacifism could be equated with nonresistance. Because biblical nonresistance is frequently confused and identified with a non-Christian pacifism, it might be helpful to point out some basic differences between the two.

They differ in orientation

True nonresistance has its roots in divine revelation, especially in the teachings of Christ and the apostles. The indispensable prerequisite for the practice of true nonresistance is the new birth, the experience of an inner spiritual renewal by the Holy Spirit. Nonresistance is therefore intimately related to a life of holiness and Christian discipleship.

Non-Christian pacifism has various ideological roots. Some pacifists renounce war on *rational grounds*. To them war belongs to the dark ages of barbarism which, in an advancing civilization, must be eliminated by proper education and an enlightened public opinion. This is partly the approach taken by Walter W. Van Kirk in his book, *Religion Renounces War*. His main argument runs as follows: We are finally in a position clearly to identify the underlying causes of war — nationalism, racial prejudice, economic rivalry, inadequate machinery for peace — and consequently we are also in a position to prescribe and provide an effective cure.³

Other pacifists renounce war on *economic grounds*. War does not pay, just as crime does not pay. These people would agree with the statement of Walter Scott, with which we concur, that "war is the only game in which both sides lose." With the threat of nuclear war as a tragic possibility, pacifists argue that any future war will mean total loss without any profit for either side. Now all this is true, but it is not adequate as a basis for Christian opposition to participation in war.

Still others object to war on *political grounds*. According to these pacifists, war is the product of a capitalistic society. Nationalism and patriotism are a façade for capitalism. Hence they advocate a new social and political order. Private property and capitalism must be abolished in order to eliminate the causes of war.

There are also people who renounce war on a variety of other *humanitarian* and *philosophical* grounds.

It is significant to note that pacifists who did not have a scriptural orientation for their convictions have, in the past, usually succumbed to the pressures of propaganda during wartime. The history of nonresistant churches has shown that only a deep per-

sonal commitment to Christ is sufficient to face the winds of nationalism and militarism in times of crisis.

They differ in application

We believe that biblical nonresistance is a teaching for followers of Christ — for born-again Christians. Only those who have become new creatures in Christ can live the new life of love and peace under all circumstances. The indwelling Holy Spirit enables the believer to love his enemies and to overcome evil with good.

Pacifists generally apply the teachings of Christ on peace to an unregenerate society and to the nation as a whole. This is true even of some so-called religious pacifists who are more concerned about the disarmament of the nation than about the non-resistance of the church. They expect governments to pass legislation which is in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount and which is in keeping with Christian ideals. Christ reminds us, however, that we cannot expect to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles (Matt. 5:16).

As children of God who have been called to be ambassadors of peace to all men and who have been especially commissioned by our Lord to be peacemakers, we sincerely appreciate every effort, including those of non-Christians, to establish and maintain peace in a warring world — whether this is done through a "peace corps" or the United Nations. At the same time, we express our conviction that all man-made schemes will fail to accomplish this objective. Nations must first come to terms with God. They must submit to the lordship of Christ before they can come to terms with one another. Man needs to be at peace with God before he can live in peace with his fellowmen. Hence evangelism is the only way that leads to genuine pacifism. True non-resistance is possible only through Christ.

They differ in aspiration

Biblical nonresistance and pacifism also differ in their objectives. The aspirations of the nonresistant Christian are related to the work and witness of the church. Our chief concern is that the church truly be the church; that it be in the world yet not of the world. We are concerned that every church member follow Christ on the pathway of true discipleship. We are concerned that every church member assume his full responsibility in carrying out the Great Commission. We believe that Christians who participate in carnal warfare deny their Lord and compro-

mise their calling. Our primary concern, therefore, is not with the elimination of war among nations, but with the Christian's participation in the wars of the world. A resolute refusal to participate in war and military service on the part of all Christians will certainly also have a direct bearing on the problem of war itself.

The primary concern of non-Christian pacifism is the abolition of war. A warless world is the utopia to which all efforts are directed. Pacifists are, consequently, more interested in the policies and legislation of governments than in the evangelism and peace witness of the church.

Pacifism is not the answer. But militarism is an even greater heresy and is even more culpable from the perspective of the gospel of God's redemptive love. We must reject the militarism of fundamentalism as firmly as we reject the pacifism of liberalism. As evangelical Christians and true Anabaptists, let us preach and practice true nonresistance through Christ.

JUST WAR — FACT OR FICTION?

Ever since the "Constantinian compromise," theologians have endeavored to find and to formulate arguments to justify the participation of the church in the wars of the state. The most substantial and, historically, the most respectable argument has been presented in the so-called "just war" theory. The origin of this theory in its Christian form can be traced back to the early post-Constantinian period.

Augustine, the most influential of all the Church Fathers, worked out an elaborate argument in favor of just wars. Although it has been wrong for Christians to fight for pagan emperors, Augustine contended, it was now their sacred duty to fight for Christian rulers.

In spite of its Roman Catholic origin, the just war theory has also become the classical argument of Protestant theology in both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. The terminology of the just war theory has in some instances been modified by theologians of the present day, but the logic actually applied in the evaluation of possible Christian participation in war is not substantially different from that of the Church Fathers and the Reformers. An examination and evaluation of this theory might also prove helpful to us as Anabaptists since we frequently encounter evangelicals who hold to this view. I shall first present the classical criteria of the just war, and then indicate several major criticisms of it.

Criteria of the just war

The standards which have been most frequently applied to determine the just war are the following.

1. Just Authority

The war must be just as to its auspices. It is to be waged only under the authority of the prince or ruler. The saying of Christ, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," has served as a classic text to support the above view. No wars were considered just if started and waged by individuals or the clergy. All revolutionary wars, or insurrections, were likewise considered as lacking proper authorization.

2. Just Cause

There must be a clear and unequivocal offence. Augustine's formula is rather vague: "Those wars may be defined as just which avenge injuries."⁴ This would obviously limit wars to defensive military operations. Moreover, a war is just only when it is a last resort, after all other means of mediation have been exhausted. A very important consideration in connection with the "just cause" is the guilt of the other party. The injustice must be clearly on one side of the conflict; thus a war can be just only on one side. In addition, there must be a reasonable hope of victory for the just cause.

3. Just Means

The evil caused by the war must be no greater than the evil to be corrected or the good which would be sacrificed if the war were not waged. According to Augustine, there should be no wanton violence, profanation of temples, looting, massacre, or conflagration. Vengeance, atrocities and reprisals were excluded.⁵

4. Just Intention

The intention must be to vindicate justice and to reestablish peace. Self-aggrandizement by the warring party is not a legitimate motivation. According to Augustine (and his views have been reiterated in the twentieth century) Christian love is not incompatible with killing since love and nonresistance are inward dispositions. Hence "love does not exclude wars of mercy waged by the good."⁶

How valid are these criteria in the light of the Scriptures and of history?

Criticisms of the just war

In the first place, we might call attention to the ambiguity of

the above criteria. To say that the means of waging warfare should be intrinsically moral, to say that more good than harm must come of the action, or to speak of just intentions, is to beg the question. Every such criterion itself needs definition. Indeed, the whole theory presupposed both a morally unified world (Christendom) and an objective Christian point of judgment (revelation). These presuppositions were lacking in the Medieval world, and they are missing in our Modern world.

In the second place, we might point out the utter fallacy of the claim to exclusive justice, though most Christian adherents of the just war theory at present maintain that there must be at least "an edge of justice." On the basis of historical records there is no evidence that the doctrine of the just war was ever used as a tool for providing moral guidance to actual political choices. According to John Howard Yoder, there

is not on record any case where a 'Christian' population of any nation refused to support the national government in the prosecution of a war because the war was unjust. The crusades, the inquisitions, colonialism, Adolf Hitler, with the wars these political systems involved, were accepted unflinchingly by Christian populations in spite of the fact that none of them could have met the above criteria.⁷

In direct contravention to the criterion that the war can be just only on one side, Catholics as well as Protestants fought on both sides of most European wars without any qualms of conscience. The just war is thus seen as an attractive theological theory, without any practical significance in the life of the church.

In the third place, we must draw attention to the means-end problem in the just war theory. Can good ends be achieved by doubtful or even foul means? Bainton makes the following observation: "The more war has improved at the point of technology, the more has it deteriorated at the point of moral discrimination."⁸ Saturation bombing obliterates all distinctions between men and women, combatants and civilians, adults and children, the guilty and the innocent. It is claimed that Christian love has had a humanizing effect on the conduct of war. John Fisher disposes of this claim rather bluntly in these words: "The humanizing of war! You might as well talk about the humanizing of Hell! . . . The essence of war is violence."⁹

Henry Stob, professor of ethics and apologetics at Calvin

Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, who finds some justification for the just war theory in the past, denounces it completely in view of modern thermonuclear war. Such a war, according to Stob, would destroy the very community in whose interests it is fought. Nuclear war means racial suicide and the end of human history.¹⁰

The just war is a strange theological fiction; the unjust war is a stark historical fact. Hence the true followers of Christ must repudiate all wars and refuse to participate in any of them.

ENDNOTES

1 Culbert G. Rutenber, *The Dagger and the Cross*. (New York: Fellowship Publications, 1950), p. 66.

2 Quoted in *Symposium on War*, compiled by John Horsch. (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1927), p. 5.

3 Walter W. van Kirk, *Religion Renounces War* (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Co., 1934).

4 Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 96.

5 Ibid., p. 97.

6 Ibid.

7 John Howard Yoder, Study Paper, Winona Lake Conference, 1963, p. 5.

8 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, p. 245.

9 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 247.

10 Henry Stob, "Is Nuclear War Justifiable? An Ethics Professor's View," *Christianity Today*, 21 June 1963, pp. 5-7.

THE CHRISTIAN AND ARMED COMBAT *

To be in the world, and yet not of the world, constitutes one of the chief and most persistent problems for the church of Jesus Christ. Neither in extreme isolation and withdrawal from the world, as seen in monasticism, nor in complete identification and cooperation with the world can the church fulfill her true mission. To be in the world and yet not of it means tension, conflict and often persecution and martyrdom for the church. One of the most crucial issues in the relationship of church and world is the question of war. In this twentieth century, which has been described by Pitirim A. Sorokin in *The Crisis of Our Age* as the bloodiest of all centuries, the study of this problem has received some new dimensions. In his classic work on Christian ethics, *The Divine Imperative*,¹ Emil Brunner contends for the right of the state, in the abstract, to defend itself by war but calls upon Christians to repudiate modern war. The Christian, says Brunner, ought to know that modern war, with its complicated mechanism for the destruction of material and spiritual goods, means disaster of such vast proportions to victor and vanquished alike that

all that used to be said in its favor, with some amount of justification, has today lost all validity. War has outlived itself. It has become so colossal that it can no longer exercise any sensible function. To expect to establish any just order by means of a world conflagration — called war — has become political madness.²

It should be noted, however, that Brunner repudiates participation in war because of his sense of political responsibility

* Address given at the meeting of the Social Action Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals and published in *The Voice* 9 (May-June 1960): 9-14.

rather than on the basis of his conviction that it is contrary to the Scriptural teaching on the Christian's new life and the Christian's mission in this world.

I would like to approach the discussion of this problem with two basic assumptions: 1) That we accept the Bible as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, and that our frame of reference in this question is therefore biblical rather than philosophical or historical, and 2) that we accept the finality of the New Testament in God's revelation to man and interpret the Scriptures christologically, with Christ as the first and final court of appeal. It is the central thesis of this short paper that those who submit unconditionally to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in faith and life cannot participate in armed combat or war. It is our deep conviction that only as we accept Christ in his authoritative teaching, in his exemplary perfect life and his redemptive death on the Cross as the final and absolute frame of reference, can we arrive at a right answer to this difficult question. We believe that the doctrine of Biblical nonresistance does not rest primarily on a number of proof texts, but is vitally related to the very essence of the gospel and to the very nature of the Christian life. Supporting texts are important but they receive their significance in the light of general principles. Let us consider the problem from the viewpoint of Christ's life, Christ's teaching and Christ's death.

CHRIST'S LIFE — THE PERFECT PATTERN FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Christ calls men and women not only to faith but also to discipleship. The way of the Cross is always linked to the work of the Cross in the Gospels. With the shadow of the Cross falling on his own pathway, Christ challenges his disciples with these words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). The true Christian accepts Christ not only as the Saviour of his soul, but also as Lord and Example in every area of his life. This is also the explicit teaching of the apostles. Peter says: "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps" (I Peter 2:21). Paul says: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). John says: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (I John 2:6). The writer of Hebrews says: "Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:13).

A little more than fifty years ago Charles M. Sheldon wrote his (now) famous book, *In His Steps*.³ It is an attempt to make the ethic of Jesus relevant to all areas of life — personal, social, economic, political — by asking the simple question: What would Jesus do? This should be the decisive question for every Christian under all circumstances. What Jesus would not do, his followers cannot do! Where Jesus does not go his disciple dare not go! Nonresistance is basically a question of Christian discipleship.

How do the Scriptures portray the Christ whom we are to follow? Perhaps the most characteristic designation of Christ in both Testaments as well as the most typical expression of his nature is given to us in the beautiful title, "the Lamb."

The Lamb symbolizes to us the virtues of purity, innocence, nonviolence and meekness. Jesus once said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29) and his whole life corresponded with that statement. John the Baptist introduced Christ with the well-known utterance, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The whole life of our Lord was an indictment of carnal force and violence. In his entire ministry he never used force to attain his ends. The cleansing of the temple as described in John 2:13-17 is no exception to this rule. Here Jesus is said to have used the whip in order to remove the commercial desecrators from the temple. Now, it is rather difficult to imagine that the Saviour who constantly healed those who were broken and wounded in body and spirit should on this occasion have inflicted bodily harm and injury on his fellowmen. But this is not the case. A poor translation has given rise to a poor argument. A correct rendering of John 2:15 according to the original should be something like this: "he drove them all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen." What the story reveals is that tables were overturned, the animals driven out with a whip, and the men sent out by the weight of Christ's moral authority. Not even property was destroyed; the owners could collect their money and their animals again and set themselves up in business elsewhere. Christ here did not act in a fit of anger, nor in the heat of passion; nor did he inflict the slightest injury on anyone.

The supreme expression of Christ's "almighty meekness" (to use the beautiful phrase of Norman P. Grubb) is found in his suffering and death on the Cross. Here the nonresistance of the Lamb was tested most severely. Yet we read of the Saviour that he "held his peace," that "he reviled not again," and that "he threatened not." This was not the course of expediency in the

face of superior force. Christ could have called "twelve legions of angels" to his defence at any time. Nor can Christ's non-resistant attitude here be fully explained by the argument that he had to die to fulfill the Scriptures. Christ could have died in a number of ways. Resistance to Roman rule, which was dictatorial and oppressive, would also have led to a death on the Cross. But such death would not have been the nonresistant death of the Lamb, and hence also not a saving death. The triumph of the Cross is the triumph of the Lamb. This Cross, however, is not only a redemptive event, but also God's method in dealing with sin, a method so revolutionary that it cuts at the root of man's recognized methods of action from primitive savagedom to modern civilization. The way of the Lamb is the way of his followers. Christ expects us to follow him as sheep (John 10:27). He sends us into the world, saying, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise (not poisonous) as serpents, and harmless as doves." World empires are represented in the Scriptures by beasts of prey. Just as birds and beasts of prey live on the blood of other animals, so the empires of this world often maintain their power by exploitation and bloody conquest. Into such a world Christ sent his disciples. The history of Christian missions contains marvellous records of how the lambs of Christ have conquered the wolves of this world by the power of love. Many of them have also followed their Lord in suffering and death. The love of Christ enables a child of God to die for his fellowmen, yes, even for his enemies, but this love makes it impossible for him to kill anyone, even his enemies.

CHRIST'S TEACHING — THE AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE FOR THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

In Matthew 5:43-45 we read,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy', but I say unto you: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven'.

Again and again we have Christ's "but I say unto you" in this great sermon in contradistinction to Old Testament teachings and contemporary interpretations and traditions. At the time of Christ's transfiguration on the mountain a voice from heaven

declared: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). This is a divine imperative for all followers of Christ: "Hear ye him!" Our primary task is not to fit Christ's teaching into the social, cultural and political pattern of our day, but rather to fit men into the unchanging and absolute pattern of Christ's teaching. A disciple is more concerned with obedience to his Lord than with the rationality of his conduct.

Time will permit only a brief reference to two basic principles relevant to this problem. Let us first consider Christ's teaching on *the absolute and all-inclusive nature of nonresistant love*.

To the lawyer who came to tempt Jesus with the question, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?" Christ gave this answer:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and all the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40).

Christ greatly simplified the complexity of Christian ethics by giving us this "higher law" of love as a universal rule of life. Now the Jews had always taken seriously the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." But the Jew identified his neighbor with his fellow Jews since elsewhere God commanded the Israelite not to avenge or bear a grudge against "the children of thy people" (Lev. 19:18). And while there is no specific command in the Old Testament to hate one's enemy, it seemed a legitimate inference to be drawn. What Christ did was to enlarge and redefine the term "neighbor." Even our enemies, according to Christ's teaching, are included in the term "neighbor." Whoever is in need is one's neighbor. This is the lesson of the parable of the Good Samaritan. "The whole witness of the New Testament is to a universal responsibility that embraces the whole of mankind."⁴ In exercising this nonresistant love towards his fellowmen, the Christian is to meet hate with love, violence with meekness, cursing with blessing. His resistance to evil is on a higher, spiritual level.

Those who defend war as a possible expression of Christian love usually urge that it is possible to engage in combat without feeling any hatred towards the enemy. In reply we would like to state that the absence of hate is not equivalent to the presence of

an active love. The fundamental incompatibility between armed combat and the demands of the Christian faith for love towards one's enemy has been eloquently described by Herbert H. Farmer:

As I contemplate myself sitting behind a machine-gun pouring molten lead into distant masses of men, or dropping bombs from a great height on towns and villages, or being trained to stab a young fellow's stomach with a bayonet before he has a chance to stab mine, and as I contemplate myself seeking in these acts to yoke my thus deliberately formed purpose to the divine purpose of love which rests on the other man even as it has rested on me, then I just seem to know that whatever qualifying considerations might be urged there is for me as a Christian absolutely and finally no other course but to say, 'No.'⁵

Christ's teaching also serves as an authoritative guidance because of *the relative nature of the Christian's responsibility to the state*. By natural birth, or perhaps by naturalization, we are citizens of some country or state. By the new birth we have become members of the kingdom of God. "God has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). The Christian has obligations to both, an earthly government as well as the King of kings. Christ answered those who sought accusations against him: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God, the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Frequently, however, the demands of Caesar and the demands of God come into conflict. What then? The apostles, who had accepted Christ's teaching as their rule of life, show us the way by their courageous answer before the Sanhedrin: "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). When loyalty to his own nation comes into conflict with loyalty to that "holy nation" of which Christ is King, a Christian can have no doubt as to which loyalty must give way. The question of the Christian's duty in time of war is not simply solved by a reference to Romans 13 and the demand of subjection to the existing authorities. The whole witness of the New Testament is that obedience to the authorities must give way before the revealed will of God. The state is not God. It seems to be nothing less than blasphemy to say that the Christian owes unqualified obedience to the state. It should be remembered that the family is also an institution ordained by

God, and that it originated in Eden *before* the Fall, whereas the state came into existence for the administration of justice in an evil society *after* the Fall. In both Testaments, children are commanded to honor and obey their parents. But this obedience is relative. Christ warns us that "he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." And we could add: He that loveth his country or nation more than me is not worthy of me!

The New Testament does not identify the Christian community with the state. It never addresses itself to the state or to the rulers of this world but speaks of them in the third person. The state, as the Anabaptists would say, is outside the "perfection of Christ." The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Christ's kingdom. Because this kingdom is not of this world, Christ's servants do not fight. To one of these servants who violated this principle, the Master said: "Put up thy sword again into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). In this rebuke of Christ to Peter, he states a general principle: "They that take the sword shall perish with it." It should be noted that this statement is made of a defensive sword. Some theologians make a distinction between wars of "aggression" and wars of "self-defence." Walter Bienert, for instance, after having stated the sinfulness of war in unequivocal terms, turns around and justifies participation of Christians in "defensive" wars. That the distinction between "aggressive" and "defensive" wars has no validity is seen from the fact that all nations, even during World War II, claimed to be fighting in self-defence. After the crucifixion, the sword is never used *by* the disciples, but it is often used *against* them.

There is a third viewpoint from which this problem should be considered.

CHRIST'S DEATH — THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

Christ came not only to *teach* and *show* us the ideal life — he came to give it to us. By his death and resurrection, he has provided a redemption from sin and has made it possible for us to participate in his divine life. This is the good news of the gospel, that Christ imparts *his life* and *his Spirit* to all those who receive him and believe in him. But by this spiritual faith union and by this identification with him in death and resurrection, the Christian's life is transformed. A brief reference to several aspects of this transformation will show its relevance to our

problem.

The Christian's New Nature

"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature (or creation); old things are passed away, behold all things have become new" (II Cor. 5:17). The "old things" should have no place in the life of the "new man." God imparts his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to his children, and he who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. What does it mean to have the Spirit of Christ? It simply means to have the *mind* of Christ, as manifested in his earthly life as we have it recorded in the Gospels. The Spirit of Christ will produce within the believer the fruit of the Spirit as described in Gal. 5:22, 23. Do the virtues of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance make a man a good soldier? Or must the activities of war be rather classified with the works of the flesh which are described as "wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness and revellings, and such like?" The Christ that indwells the believer is the Christ of the Gospels. Can we imagine the Saviour as a national patriot, fighting for the Jews against the Romans? If war is sin, if it is "the sum total of human villainies," as John Wesley has described it, then, in my humble opinion, the Christian cannot participate in armed combat with a good conscience.

The Christian's New Relationships

The believer is a member of the body of Christ. "By one Spirit, we are all baptized into the body, whether we be Jews or gentiles, whether we be bond or free" (I Cor. 12:13). The church, the *ecclesia*, is a called-out assembly from among all nations. The true believers of all countries are therefore vitally related not only to Christ but also to one another. They are members of one body. Has this great truth found expression in the life of the church? How often has this truth of the unity of all believers been distorted by Christians fighting Christians. What a tragedy when national patriotism overrules love for the brethren during war time! William C. Allen describes this tragedy in the following words: "When war involves Methodists stabbing Methodists, Baptists shooting Baptists, Presbyterians blowing Presbyterians to bits, Catholics annihilating Catholics . . . then I am sure that war is contrary to Christian principles."⁶ In Christ there is neither Jew or Greek. National and natural ties are of little significance; spiritual ties and relationships are of primary

importance. By his death Christ has broken down "the middle wall of partition" between national groups, and this has provided the true basis of peace "with all men."

The Christian's New Mission

The supreme duty of Christians, individually and collectively, is to carry out the great commission. Just as nations send their soldiers to the ends of the world to destroy, so Christ sends his disciples to the ends of the world to save. World missions and world wars are diametrically opposed to each other. The army of salvation cannot be in the same camp with the army of destruction. It is our deep conviction that one of the chief reasons for the church's failure in world evangelization has been her inconsistency and compromise in the question of war. Almost insuperable barriers have been raised for our missionary efforts as a result of this tragic compromise of the church's call and calling. Sometimes the question arises in our mind whether the church has not destroyed as many lives by its participation in the wars of the world as it was saved through all the missionary efforts. Christ's mission in the world is the *only* mission of his church. He said to his disciples before his ascension: "As my father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). All our energies, time and talents must be made subservient to this great task of evangelism and missions. Obedience to Christ's command may mean martyrdom and death. But the blood of the martyrs is still the seed of the church and the means for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

The views presented here may appear naive, utopian, unrealistic and unworkable in our modern world; but in view of Christ's exemplary life, his authoritative teaching, and his redemptive death, we humbly but firmly confess: "Thither lies truth."

ENDNOTES

1 Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

2 Ibid., p. 478.

3 Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1935).

4 Culbert S. Rutenber, *The Dagger and the Cross* (New York: Fellowship Publications, 1950), p. 66.

5 As quoted in *ibid*, p. 56.

6 John Horsch, Compiler, *Symposium on War* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1927), p. 10.

THE EXPRESSION OF OUR PEACE WITNESS *

Is there a need to re-examine the expression of our peace witness in relation to our total Christian witness in today's world?

On a plane trip between Montevideo and Asuncion two years ago, I sat next to a member of the U.S. diplomatic corps. During our conversation I presented the claims of Christ to him and asked him to accept Him as Saviour and Lord. He courteously but firmly rejected these claims and gave me his reasons. He was very familiar with American evangelicalism because his parents were Southern Baptists. As a young man he had been associated with this Church. As a member of the diplomatic corps he had spent twenty-five years abroad, most of which he had spent in Asian countries. He became acquainted with other religions or, better stated, with people of other religions. He considered Buddhism superior to Christianity since Buddhists were more peace-loving and more gentle and kind than Christians. He was applying the biblical axiom, "By their fruits you shall know them," in his evaluation of the Christian faith. My counterargument, that even though institutional Christianity has failed there are many Christians today who endeavor to follow Christ's life and teaching, seemed rather unconvincing to him.

Some years ago a series of articles appeared in the *Sheaf*, the student paper of the University of Saskatchewan, on the relevance of Christian faith to man's problems. The writer, a senior student, found Christianity wanting. His most devastating arguments were based on the history of the Christian church in relation to the war issue. He pointed out that throughout its history, especially in the Western World, the church had sanctioned and supported every war of nationalism and imperialism.

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 1 November 1968, pp. 4-6.

In addition, it had fought many wars in its own interest such as the Crusades and religious war of the Middle Ages. His arguments were not refuted.

Is there a need in today's world to give a clear and positive expression of our peace witness? I believe there is a desperate need for such an expression as part of our missionary message and ministry generally. What are the basic assumptions underlying our peace witness? They are as follows: 1) That we accept God's revelation in Christ, his exemplary life, his authoritative teaching, and his redemptive death as the basis of our peace witness, and 2) That this truth find its primary expression in all interpersonal relationships of the believer: in his family, in his professional associations, and in his intra- and inter-church relationships.

Although the responsibility for a proper expression of our peace witness must begin "in Jerusalem," it cannot be restricted to this area. I wish to suggest four areas for the expression of our peace witness.

RECONCILIATION IN AREAS OF CONFLICT

As Christians we are to be not only "peace messengers" but also "peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9). By such a ministry of peace-making we prove our divine sonship. As Dan Zehr expressed it recently, "A man cannot truly claim reconciliation with God by way of the Cross until he pursues reconciliation with man by way of the Cross." A few specific areas of tension might be mentioned in which the healing ministry of the church should demonstrate the relevance and power of the gospel.

We know that *industrial tensions*, as manifested by strikes, lockouts and prolonged lawsuits, seriously affect the life and peace of a community and sometimes of the whole country. In recent years this problem has moved to the very doorstep of the Christian church. As a result of rapid urbanization, most of our church members today are either employers or employees. In order to preserve industrial peace in labor-management relations and, more importantly, to preserve the spirit of unity and love in the community of believers, both sides need the counsel of the Christian church.

In this situation, I believe it is our responsibility to earnestly and unitedly seek God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. How can we help a brother when he is forced to join a labor union that endorses strikes and other means of coercion to

obtain certain ends? How can we help a brother who is an employer to establish and maintain relations with his employees that will be truly Christian? Should the churches, perhaps, appoint commissions with representatives from both groups to work on guidelines for a Christian labor code and a Christian management code?

The church should also consider moving into the working class segment of society, which in many instances has no connection with any organized church. These people often view the church as a bulwark for the preservation of the status quo.

In a Paris suburb, a Mennonite mission some time ago attempted to reach the community for Christ. Four thousand handbills were distributed in which people were invited to attend the showing of a Billy Graham film. Not a single person from this community, which was dominated largely by radical socialists, responded to the invitation. Now the mission has started a new approach. A home for handicapped children has been established in the area and, according to latest reports, people are beginning to come.

In Christ all *racial as well as class distinctions* cease (Gal. 3:28). In a world filled with racial hatred and torn by racial strife, the church must express its peace witness in a ministry of healing and reconciliation. Unfortunately, the church has often followed a policy of racial discrimination and segregation instead of reconciliation as, for example, with the Reformed Church's support of apartheid in South Africa.

In the largest modern "Christian democracy," the United States, racial tensions and conflicts have assumed such proportions that they constitute the greatest problem the nation has faced since the Civil War. Has the Christian church contributed, perhaps by default, to the present predicament? According to some surveys, churches belong to those institutions which have been most reluctant to integrate. Evangelical churches, unfortunately, are no exception. There is something basically wrong here. Should evangelicals not be on the growing edge of social and economic reform, especially where these affect the racial peace and harmony in the community and in the church itself? Judgment as well as restoration in the area of racial tensions must begin in the "household of God" (I Peter 4:17). There is a desperate need for bridges of mutual love and respect to be built, even between the evangelicals of both races. Where there is a will there will be a way, and it will likely not be the way of protest marches.

In Canada we also have racial problems. There are Indian reservations and ethnic ghettos in the large metropolitan areas of our country. Here too there is opportunity for the expression of a practical peace witness.

The church of Jesus Christ is supra-national in character and thus prevented by its nature from taking sides in *international conflicts*. God is neither a respecter of persons nor of political ideologies. Through a ministry of suffering love in the areas of conflict, doors are opened for the proclamation of the message of reconciliation. We should be grateful that the Lord has given us the opportunity for such a ministry in Vietnam through the Mennonite Central Committee. During the Viet Cong's "New Year's Offensive" in February (1968), a number of MCC workers were in the city of Hue, which was captured by the Viet Cong. They were permitted to carry on their ministry, however, because they were known as people who had not taken sides in the conflict.

I believe that it is important that evangelicals make every effort to send material aid and medical supplies to North Vietnam. Even though this may be but token aid, it could have far-reaching consequences for the future of missionary work in South East Asia. Many Asians identify Christianity not only with the white race but also with militarism. May God help us to change that image through a ministry of peace and reconciliation.

PEACE WITNESS AND MISSIONS

As ministers and stewards of the gospel, we are under sacred obligation to proclaim "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Christ has commissioned us to teach new converts "to observe all things" that he has committed to our trust (Matt. 28:20). In our Confession of Faith we have accepted the doctrine of peace and nonresistance as normative for faith and practice.

It is very disturbing that many ministers seldom, if ever, refer to this doctrine in their preaching and teaching. Shortly after World War II, I gave lectures on this doctrine in a church in Western Canada. After one of the meetings a father came to me and asked, "Why didn't our ministers tell me these things ten years ago?" In his family he had suffered the consequences of a lack of proper teaching.

We need a renewal of commitment to this doctrine in our pulpits and in our classrooms. This commitment should also ap-

ply to missionaries. Nonresistance must be taught in the younger churches as a vital part of Christian discipleship. In the endeavor to build "national churches," great care should be taken that they do not develop into "handmaids" to a militant nationalism.

The history of missions, especially in Africa, has shown that young converts who have not been taught to follow Christ on the pathway of love, peace and nonresistance, may easily and unwittingly become the tools of violent revolutionary movements. Missionaries carry a great responsibility for the establishment of a biblical pattern in church-state relationships on the mission fields.

When I was asked to give lectures on nonresistance in our churches in Brazil in 1951, I was expecting opposition, because a number of our young men were serving in the military forces at that time. What I had not anticipated, however, was that opposition would come primarily from a North American missionary.

During my recent ministry in our churches in Europe I have appreciated the concern our brethren have for a proper teaching and expression of Christian pacifism. It is not easy for young men who come from families with a military tradition to refuse military service and accept some form of alternative service. But we are grateful that this is happening in Germany today. May we not fail to give proper expression to our peace witness in our missionary outreach at home and abroad.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER EVANGELICALS

As nonresistant Christians we have a signal responsibility to other evangelicals who do not have this view, but with whom we share a common faith in the redemptive work of Christ. Nonresistance is not a denominational doctrine but a basic aspect of New Testament discipleship and, hence, the normative pattern of life for all of Christ's followers. Could it be that some day these other evangelical groups will rise up against us in judgment for not sharing with them our understanding of the implications of Christian discipleship?

I was asked to speak on this subject at a meeting in Germany at which various evangelical groups were represented. During the discussion period which followed two medical doctors presented the same challenge: "You have such a great spiritual heritage; why don't you speak up and share it with others?" I made an attempt to do this at the National Association of Evangelicals Convention in Chicago in 1960. Upon request I

spoke at the meeting of the Social Action Committee on the subject, "The Christian and Armed Combat."¹ After the meeting the chairman admitted that Evangelicals had never seriously considered this problem. Is it not our duty, therefore, to ask them in the spirit of deep humility and brotherly love to make Christ's claims of nonresistant discipleship their serious concern?

In recent years many Evangelicals have been shaken out of their theological complacency. Even Reformed theologians today question the "just war" theory. They begin to realize that war, especially modern war, is a complete denial of the gospel. Here is our responsibility and our opportunity. In recent years I have received several requests for articles on the subject of the Christian peace witness. These requests have come from non-pacifist churches. In one case an article was reprinted and distributed among approximately eight thousand university students. I am sure other brethren have had similar experiences in their personal contacts with other Evangelicals. But the time has come, I believe, when we must lift up our voices as a united brotherhood in a "communication of concern" to other evangelical bodies who do not hold the position of a biblical pacifism.

PROPHETIC ROLE TOWARD GOVERNMENT

In practice, our traditional theory of the separation of church and state breaks down at many points. The neat division of our world into two completely independent realms is both unrealistic and unscriptural. It has often provided us with a plausible excuse for our flight from social concern and responsibility. In practice we resort to the old "Lutheran dualism," whereby we act as Christians in the one realm and as ordinary citizens in the other. We should perhaps remind ourselves at this point that this was the mentality of German Christians (with a few notable exceptions) during the Third Reich. The consequences were disastrous for both church and state.

A leading Evangelical told us some time ago that he was shocked to discover the same mentality among American Christians in the sixties that had characterized German Christians in the thirties. As followers of Christ we can neither suspend our Christian convictions nor resign from our Christian responsibilities when we participate in the life of the state. Our obligation to speak to the state on social and moral issues with a "prophetic voice" arises from two considerations.

First, the state is "ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1) as an agency

for the administration of justice and the maintenance of law and order. Whenever the government fails to fulfill its proper function, when it discriminates against certain ethnic or religious groups, we must and should express our legitimate concern.

In the past most Christian groups have accepted the principle of speaking to government on matters related to their own interests. It was largely in response to a proposal by the "historic peace churches" that the Canadian government provided alternative service for conscientious objectors during World War II. I believe the time has come when we should also speak for other groups who have received unfair treatment in our society.

Second, elected members of the provincial or federal governments are, in many instances, professing Christians. Is it not our duty to challenge them to act in accordance with their Christian convictions and principles? Should they not exert a positive influence when laws are being made and passed on such issues as immigration, divorce and sale of liquor? No government can be made truly Christian but many of its measures and laws can be brought more nearly into line with God's standards of justice — even with his redemptive purposes.

I believe we can also properly express our peace witness by encouraging our government to use its good offices for the mediation of international disputes and to promote peace wherever possible. Even though such a "political peace" does not solve man's basic problems, it often has a direct bearing on the propagation of the gospel of peace (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

God has called us to serve him in this crucial hour of man's history. The world needs not only a proclamation but also a demonstration of the gospel of peace. May the Lord give us the spirit of discernment so that we may know in this our day the things which belong to our peace.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See chapter 14, "The Christian and Armed Combat."

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO COMMUNISM *

It appears to me that the problem we are facing in connection with our topic is largely academic. Few, if any, of our church members have the opportunity of a direct confrontation with Communists.

A Christian response, it would seem, requires an encounter with people, not only with an ideology. In this respect the Christian's response to anti-Communism can be expressed in a more realistic fashion in a "concrete historical situation," since we are confronted with the representatives of such movements in our Mennonite constituency.

Since we are dealing primarily with people rather than with systems of political or philosophical thought in our Christian witness and work, I shall discuss the Christian's response to Communism in terms of interpersonal and intergroup relationships.

Our topic calls for a consideration of the "Christian" response to Communism. A Christian response we understand to be one that is conditioned and determined by the experience of God's redemptive love in Christ, and one that is informed by the teachings of Christ and the Scriptures. With such a frame of reference it is obvious that the Christian response to Communism will differ widely from that of people whose response is determined by ideas and ideals of nationalism, patriotism, democracy or free enterprise.

What are the requirements and implications of a Christian response to Communism?

* *Christians Between East and West*. Christians Concerns Series, No. 1, ed. Leo Driedger, Winnipeg, MB: Board of Christian Service, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1965), pp. 17-23.

ESSENTIAL SCRIPTURAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

In a proper approach to the problem, several fundamental concepts of Scripture must be acknowledged. In the first place, we need to remind ourselves that the world we face as Christians is an *undivided world*. The teaching of Christ and of the apostles as expressed in the New Testament emphasizes this truth. God's redemptive love and Christ's teachings encompass the whole world (John 3:16). The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) contains an authoritative command to "make disciples of *all nations*," including the Communist nations!

This concept of one world, in which all cultural and national distinctions and divisions are of no spiritual significance, constituted one of the gravest problems in the missionary advance of the early Church (Acts 10:34). Deeply ingrained in Jewish thought was the concept of two realms or worlds—a pious Jewish world and a pagan gentile world. By divine revelation the apostle Paul perceived the essential unity of all mankind and that Jews and gentiles were in need of the same gospel (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:23, 24).

Christians in America, including many Mennonite Christians, have become accustomed to think in terms of a divided world. The Iron Curtain constitutes not only a line of division between different ideologies and political systems for these people, but also a line of division between moral and religious realms. Christians who hold to such a dichotomy of the world find the kingdom of God primarily in the democracies of the West: beyond the Iron Curtain, in the countries of socialism and Communism, they find primarily the realm of Satan.

This unscriptural and unrealistic geographic dichotomy of the world into a realm of light and a realm of darkness is very popular in evangelical circles and is occasionally even supported by an appeal to prophecy. Christ and the Scriptures recognize no man-made barriers in the execution of God's plan of redemption.

Secondly, we need to remind ourselves that the world the Christian faces is a *sinful world*. There may be a difference in the expression of sinfulness between a Communist-sinner and a capitalist-sinner. The difference, however, is one of form and degree, not of essence. This is the point of Paul's argument in Romans 3, where he raises the question of the privileged position of the Jews: "What then? Are we Jews any better off?" The answer is emphatic:

No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no not one . . . no one does good, not even one . . . for there is no distinction, since all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. . . (Rom. 3:9, 10, 12, 22-23).

The parallel to our present situation is obvious. Christ's severest denunciations are directed against religious hypocrites and self-righteous people, not against political opponents or religious illiterates. In condemning professing atheists under Communism, we often overlook the practicing atheists under capitalism. Before God all men are sinners, whether they are Republicans or Democrats, Liberals or Conservatives, socialists or Communists. The differences are quantitative, not qualitative! For an effective witness we must retain this divine perspective.

In the third place, the Christian must constantly keep in mind that he faces a *redeemable world*. All men, regardless of class or condition, have redemptive potential. None is beyond the reach and power of God's saving grace. Christ's vicarious death atoned "for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). God's love for the world is a love for his enemies (Rom. 5:8-10). He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

Unfortunately, this emphasis is largely missing in the current discussion of the response of the Christian church to Communism. We are challenged to fight against the Communists. A policy of ruthless and complete extermination of all Communists is recommended to the government by "Christian" leaders.

According to the philosophy of these men, the Christian response to these enemies of God and men should be in the form of a nuclear bomb, and not in terms of the gospel of peace. Communists must be destroyed, not saved! It has always been by the glory of his grace that God transforms his greatest enemies into his most effective ambassadors. We must see also in the Communist a man created in God's own image, an individual constituted for sonship in the family of God.

It would appear to me that a proper response to Communism is impossible without the acceptance of these necessary scriptural presuppositions. A Christian response to Communism, moreover, requires certain basic Christian attitudes.

BASIC CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES

We are to display the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5) in all interpersonal relationships. The anti-Communism of many professing Christians would doubtlessly be subject to the same censure as that expressed in Christ's rebuke of his disciples: ". . . Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). What kind of spirit should characterize our response to Communism?

The Spirit of Deep Humility

Communists are quick to point out the glaring inconsistencies between Christian profession and Christian practice. Several Communist leaders have claimed, with some degree of justification, that they practice what the Christians preach! The church's tragic failure to relate its faith to the total needs of man cannot be excused. It calls for repentance and confession. The reason for failure has been well expressed in the following statement: "Christianity is the flag under which we sail, but it is not the rudder which steers our course."¹

A study of the Old Testament prophets will reveal that some of their severest criticisms are directed against the social and economic injustices among God's chosen people. They never appear as defenders of the status quo; they invariably take up the cause of the oppressed and the poor, of the widows and orphans.

Christ continues this "prophetic ministry" in the society of his day. The apostles follow in the tradition of Christ and the prophets. The early Church manifested strong "communitistic" tendencies (Acts 2,4). In the Epistles, the apostles warn against the dangers of wealth (1 Tim. 6:9, 10) and against withholding just wages for workingmen (James 5:4-6).

The church, and especially church leadership, has largely lost its prophetic voice against social injustices and economic oppression. We have not manifested the deep concern and compassion towards the underprivileged, the unemployed, the disabled and other victims of our modern industrial society.

We shall not be able to enter into a profitable dialogue with Communists unless we approach them in the spirit of deep humility and with the honest acknowledgment of our individual and corporate shortcomings in the demonstration of the Christian ethic.

The Spirit of Objective Inquiry

Christians, of all people, should not be guilty of deliberate

prevarication or malicious slander! Anabaptist-Christians should have a special concern for *historische Sauberkeit*, realizing that they have often suffered in the past because both Protestants and Catholics were not willing to approach the Radical Reformers in the spirit of objective inquiry. Luther labeled all *Taeufer* indiscriminately as *Schwaermer*. Just as there was no difference between demons (*Teufel*), he said, so there was also no difference between the various Anabaptists (*Taeufer*).

As a result of such an unreasonable and bigoted attitude, the Anabaptist movement suffered the greatest injustice from people who claimed to have rediscovered the gospel of God's grace. The name "Anabaptist" evoked a similar response in the Christian society of the sixteenth century as the name "Communist" does in the twentieth century. In both instances the spirit of objective inquiry has often been missing.

We must avoid the common errors of generalization and oversimplification. To equate Communism with sin, or to identify Communism with atheism, constitute such errors. Not everything in Communism is bad; not everything in capitalism is good. At present, as Russell L. Mast puts it, "it often appears in our time, that there is a greater concern whether a thought or action is right or left, than whether it is right or wrong."²

It is often overlooked that Communism, defined in terms of political theory, is a radical form of socialism. Socialism, as a political philosophy, has its historical roots in the democracies of the West, and it is finding increasing acceptance among many people of the Western world as a possible solution to man's economic and political problems in the twentieth century, as exemplified by the Labor Government in Great Britain.

It cannot be denied that there is a concern for social justice and for economic equality in Communist countries. We may condemn the methods employed and question the results achieved in these efforts but we must also acknowledge that progress has been made in different areas. It is true that basically Communism is a materialistic philosophy; but is it not also true that our Western society is permeated with the spirit of materialism? Objectivity and fairness should characterize our approach to the problem.

The Spirit of Redemptive Concern

Christ came not to destroy men's lives but to save them. This spirit must find expression in our message and ministry. If we want to be true sons of the heavenly Father, we must love our

enemies and pray for our persecutors in accordance with the teachings of Christ (Matt. 5:44). Our ministry is one of reconciliation. We proclaim a Saviour who has "broken down the middle wall of partition," and who has "abolished in his flesh the enmity" (Eph. 2:14, 15).

In the Christian's response to Communism there is no place for the spirit of hate. The church of Christ is not the instrument of God's wrath with which he inflicts punishment upon the wicked; it is rather the messenger of his grace and peace through whom he brings healing to the nations and hope to a lost world.

The Spirit of a Dynamic Faith.

The Christian response to Communism in the past has too often been characterized by the spirit of pessimism, skepticism and defeatism. We forget that Christ is the Lord of history, that God is the sovereign ruler of the universe. Men and movements are subject to his providential control and must serve the purposes of his kingdom. But his providence does not exclude our faith and our prayers. These are "means" of Providence to accomplish his purposes and execute his plans. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea By faith the walls of Jericho fell down Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb. 11:29, 30, 33).

Such dynamic faith is needed in the Christian's response to Communism. Such faith is the "victory that overcometh the world" (I John 5:4). Such faith is confident that the God who brought down the walls of Jericho is also able to bring down the "Iron Curtain" of Communism. Such faith knows that all power, not only in heaven but also in earth, belongs to the living Christ.

A proper Christian response, however, must not only find expression in attitudes, but also in actions. Therefore a third requirement should be considered briefly.

STRATEGIC EVANGELICAL ACTION

Three lines of action might be suggested.

A Positive Proclamation of Christ

In his article "Christian Policy Toward Communist Advance," Andrew Shelly points out that the need of the hour can only be met by a proclamation of the "full gospel" of Jesus

Christ. This applies to our ministry in non-committed countries, especially the new nations of Africa. All identification of Christianity with Western culture, or the "American way of life," must be completely eliminated. All traces of racial prejudice must be removed. God is no respecter of persons, and he offers his grace freely to all.

This emphasis must also be observed when we bring the gospel message to the nations behind the Iron Curtain by means of radio. When the Russian Baptist leaders during their 1964 visit to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, were asked what suggestions or counsel they could give to those who were engaged in a radio ministry to the Russian people, they expressed a twofold concern: the message should be positive and Christ-centered, and it should also avoid any polemics of a political or economic nature. Christ transcends any political or economic system.

A Practical Demonstration of Love

In Jesus Christ only a faith that works by love accomplishes anything (Gal. 5:6). A faith without works is dead. The poor and the destitute are weary and disillusioned by a verbalized expression of the Christian faith. We need to heed the exhortation of the apostle John: "My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18). Our world-wide relief program, as administered by the Mennonite Central Committee, as well as by the Boards of Missions and General Welfare, constitutes a tremendous opportunity for the demonstration of Christian love. We must put forth still greater efforts to counteract the threat of Communism in the non-committed countries of Africa and Asia by a practical demonstration of faith.

The first large-scale relief program of the Mennonite Central Committee was launched in Communist Russia in 1921. If the doors should once more open for such a ministry in countries behind the Iron Curtain, we should not hesitate to enter. Deeds are always better understood than words. People will be led to praise God when they see our good works (Matt. 5:16). Evil can only be overcome with good (Rom. 12:21).

A Personal Encounter with People Under Communism

Greater effectiveness in the communication of our message can only be achieved by more direct contacts and personal encounters with people who live under Communist rule. The early

Church faced formidable ideological barriers in its missionary advance. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. An "Iron Curtain" of religious and social prejudice separated them. The Great Commission, however, included Samaria, and by God's grace the borders were crossed and contacts were established. The "wall of separation" between Jew and gentile was difficult to remove. But by his ministry in the house of Cornelius, Peter breached the wall (Acts 10).

Christian strategy with regard to Communist countries should include two things: opportunities should be sought for fellowship with believers, and avenues should be explored for a dialogue with and a witness to professing Communists. There is no alternative to involvement for winning people to Christ and his kingdom.

The chief issue before the world today is not the issue of Christianity or Communism, Jesus Christ or Karl Marx. Both capitalism and Communism stand under God's judgment. The chief issue is the acceptance and recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord of life and history by all men. The proclamation of Christ's lordship is the supreme task of the church and of the individual Christian in today's world.

ENDNOTES

1 Quoted by Russel L. Mast in *Christianity and Communism* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 12.

2 Ibid., p. 14.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE STATE *

The question of "Christian" patriotism is receiving increasing attention among American evangelicals in our day. The editors of *Christianity Today* find it necessary to publish an annual "patriotic" issue for the purpose of justifying and promoting the "American dream."¹ Churchmen and pastors vividly portray their faith in the American dream by symbolically planting the star-spangled banner alongside the banner of the Cross near the pulpit of the church. Preachers eloquently blend evangelicalism with patriotism in their message — an evangelical message being one in which the pro-American and anti-Communist emphases must not be missing.

PAUL AND PATRIOTISM

For scriptural support of Christian patriotism theologians often turn to the apostle Paul. It is rather easy to fit certain biblical data into one's own pattern of thought. Was Paul a national patriot? The question must be considered in the total context of his life, mission and teaching. Paul's patriotism could have been either Jewish or Roman. Let us consider these possibilities.

Not a Jewish Patriot

Patriotism, as defined by the *Oxford International Dictionary*, is a "love of, or zealous devotion to one's country." Did Paul, the Christian, manifest such "zealous devotion" to the land of his fathers, Palestine, or to a political entity, the Jewish nation?

If Paul had been a Jewish patriot he would have combined his evangelism with a "Christian" Zionism. In Paul's day, thousands of Jews lived outside Palestine and the return of his people

* *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 2 July 1965, p. 8; 20 August 1965, p. 7.

to their native land would have been one of the chief concerns of the apostle. There is nothing in the record of the New Testament, however, that would indicate such concern. From the viewpoint of patriotism, Paul's references to his people are often severely critical and unpatriotic. To the Thessalonians he writes that they have suffered the same things from their countrymen that the churches in Palestine have suffered from the Jews, "who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men" (I Thess. 2:15).

After his conversion the apostle Paul was not interested in Jewish nationalism but rather in Jewish evangelism. What things had been gain to him, he now counted loss for Christ (Phil. 3:4-7). In his redemptive concern, however, the Jewish people occupied a position of primacy. The spiritual burden of the apostle finds eloquent expression in such passages as Romans 9:1-3 and Romans 10:1 (see also Rom. 1:16, "to the Jew first"). In these passages he speaks of the "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart because of the spiritual condition of his "brethren" and "kinsmen by race." This is the only "zealous devotion" I find in Paul's heart, and if this is patriotism, we would covet for ourselves and for all of God's people a great measure of it.

Some theologians would argue that Paul's patriotism was not Jewish, but Roman, in character. Do the Scriptures bear this out?

Not a Roman Patriot

In this connection possibly no other passage is quoted as frequently as Paul's statement in Acts 21:39 in order to show that the apostle also possessed patriotic feelings. There, in his defence, Paul makes reference to the fact that he is "from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city." In these words theologians have detected a loving and proud regard for the city of his birth. We gladly concede that such a sentiment appears to be expressed here. But this sentiment certainly cannot be equated with Roman patriotism, nor can it be used to support Christian patriotism today. Nor can Paul's references to his Roman citizenship (Acts 21:27-28) be adduced as evidence of his patriotism. These statements were made for the purpose of clarifying his status, and not for the purpose of glorifying his earthly citizenship.

Nor does Paul's teaching in Romans 13 provide any basis for a patriotic loyalty to the state. Paul simply accepted constituted authority as of God and demanded of believers submission to the

existing authorities. Hence the Christian can never be a political revolutionary. This, however, does not imply an attitude of complete acquiescence, or a policy of "my country right or wrong." Unfortunately, such an inference has been drawn from Romans 13 by the protagonists of a so-called Christian patriotism. Paul's patriotism, if we may call it that, in relation to Rome found expression in his respect for constituted authority, in his payment of all dues and in his prayer for rulers and "the powers that be." Nowhere in his epistles, addressed largely to gentile Christians within the Roman Empire, do we find any injunction to nurture and promote Christian patriotism. Such patriotism became a part of Christendom only after the union of church and state in the fourth century.

Paul had fully grasped the implications of the Great Commission and constantly manifested a redemptive concern for all men regardless of race or nationality. This conviction of the apostle finds its classic formulation in his statement in I Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some." Paul was a supra-nationalist with a fervent zeal for the expansion of God's kingdom. Patriotic nationalism would have been completely incompatible with his missionary world vision. Today, more than ever, we need to return to his passion for a sinful and suffering humanity which excluded any patriotism related to national or political interests. We serve God, our country and the world in the most effective manner when we fulfill our missionary calling.

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

The problem of participation in politics presents the conscientious Christian with a severe dilemma. Participation may easily lead to an involvement which might compromise his Christian convictions as well as his Christian witness. Non-participation may result in the charge of passive acquiescence in the moral evils and social and economic injustices of our day. It is the age-old dilemma of being in the world and yet not of the world.

There is a story that a theologian met the great German historian Leopold von Ranke and embraced him effusively. "Ah, please," said Ranke, drawing himself away, "there is a great difference between us for you are first of all a great Christian and I am first of all an historian." The "first of all" in a man's life is of utmost significance in his attempt to solve complex ethical prob-

lems. The follower of Christ who earnestly endeavors to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33) will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, find a solution that will bring honor to God and blessing to his fellowmen. Let us consider the problem from two broad perspectives in the light of Scripture and history.

Evangelical theologians of the present day would, possibly without exception, categorically assert that the church has no business to meddle with politics. The commonly accepted axiom of the separation of church and state would require as a corollary that the church cannot function in the political sphere. The church differs from the state in origin, in nature, in mission and in ultimate goals. It should be pointed out, however, that for many centuries the church claimed the prerogative to direct and dominate the affairs of the state. The union of the church and state implied a close connection between church and politics. This pattern may be observed not only in the *corpus Christianum* of Medieval Europe but also in post-Reformation England, where the bishops of the Anglican Church sat in the House of Lords. In early American history we have a classic example of this pattern in the "holy commonwealth" of the New England Puritans. Whether the present strong emphasis on the separation of church and state is due to new theological insights on the nature of the church, or whether it is simply the result of religious pluralism especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, is a question that cannot be easily answered since many evangelical advocates of this principle still maintain certain practices (e.g., infant baptism) which were originally closely identified with the state-church system.

As one studies the church's role in politics both in medieval and modern history, two facts seem to emerge rather clearly: first, the church has usually lost her true character and compromised her primary calling by involvement in politics; second, the state has not prospered in countries where the church has controlled politics. In most instances the church, as a body, has opposed social and economic change and reform, and thus has been a bulwark for the preservation of the status quo.

But how about the individual Christian? Should he not become actively involved in the political life of the nation in order to bring about change and reform in keeping with Christian principles? This and similar questions are raised with increasing frequency in our Brotherhood.

At this point we need to remind ourselves that in a demo-

cracy participation in government implies participation in party government. This raises the whole question of the Christian's relation to political organizations.

Any realistic appraisal of political parties in both Canada and the United States will lead to the conclusion that no party can be truly denominated as Christian. Although there are professing Christians in all of them, no party has the Sermon on the Mount as a plank in its platform and the establishment of God's kingdom as its main objective. Many parties, it is true, have been started with the avowed purpose of implementing certain Christian principles in the economic and social life of the nation. In Canada both the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the Social Credit Party owe their inception to Christian idealism, and hence we find also a number of prominent clergymen in the leadership of these movements.

In our Mennonite communities strong preference has been expressed in recent years for the Social Credit Party as coming closer than any other to the Christian ideal. When some years ago I made a public statement to the effect that no political party in Canada could be described as Christian, including the Social Credit Party, I received an indignant letter the following week. Yet the fact that the Premier of Alberta is a devout Christian does not make the Social Credit a Christian party.

This holds true of all others, even of those parties in Europe which bear the Christian label and call themselves Christian Socialists or Christian Democrats. (In Germany, for instance, the Christian Democrats have been in power uninterruptedly since the War.)

For the disciple of Christ whose "first of all" is God's kingdom, serious problems arise if he identifies himself with any political party. Politics is the art of compromise, and hence it tends to corrupt ethical standards. The politician must mollify pressure groups, and conciliate divergent and hostile interests. Moreover, successful politics seems to require the use of techniques that are foreign to the Christian. In running for political office, the candidates must engage in self-adulation, which stands in sharp contrast with the biblical principle of spiritual humility. He is expected to "win friends and influence people" by means of promises and patronage. Then, also, it must not be overlooked that the implementation of political measures often depends on coercion and the recourse to physical force. In his scholarly treatise, *The Christian in Politics*, Walter James admits that "politics can never be made Christian," but in the same breath

he continues, "this does not mean that Christians are not called to take part."²

We believe that the proper solution to this problem is found neither in a policy of total withdrawal nor in a policy of total involvement. Since the Christian's primary loyalty is to Christ and his kingdom, his participation in the affairs of an earthly kingdom or state must of necessity be limited. Complete identification with the political and economic order makes a prophetic witness against that social order impossible. Although I disagree with the basic theological position of Harry Emerson Fosdick, I concur with the following statement he once made: "Accommodate yourself to the prevailing culture, but stand out from it and against it." You can't challenge the social order unless you stand out from it and against it.

It is unfortunate that many professing Christians, including Mennonite Brethren, have accepted a kind of "hyphenated" citizenship as the norm for their lives in this world in which the claims of Christ and the claims of Caesar are considered of equal validity and where the demands of the two kingdoms must be constantly and carefully balanced. Public opinion and social pressure determine in a given situation whether we are to give our primary loyalty to God or to the state. Such a dual citizenship is completely foreign to the New Testament. Our citizenship, according to the apostle Paul, is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our status in this world is described as that of "pilgrims and strangers" (I Peter 2:11) who have certain obligations to the "powers that be" and, as "ambassadors," have a great mission to all nations. Unless this fact of the primacy and supremacy of our heavenly citizenship is firmly grasped, the Christian's conduct will be characterized by vacillation and compromise. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that our heavenly citizenship conditions and limits our earthly citizenship.

Perspectives for Participation

In all interpersonal and intergroup relationships the Christian is to be governed by the principle of nonconformity and separation from the world (II Cor. 6:14-18; Rom. 12:2). The believer cannot restrict the lordship of Christ to his inner life, to private morality, and allow his outer life, his public morality, to be governed by an unchristian public opinion. Such a double standard in Christian ethics, as advocated by some sophisticated theologians, is contrary to New Testament teaching. The believer cannot play two roles: the role of a practical politician

in one situation, and the role of a pious Christian in the other. He cannot suspend the operation of his conscience and abdicate his moral responsibilities at any time. His participation in government will be limited by the scriptural principles of separation and sanctification.

Moreover, the Christian is to be governed in all relationships and in all situations by a redemptive purpose. His primary vocation is to be that of a witness to Christ's saving grace. His chief concern in life is to win men for Christ and to lead them to a fruitful life in the fellowship of the church. Participation in politics tends to deflect the Christian from the path of his primary interests in the spiritual welfare of men to secondary concerns related to the social and economic well-being of his fellow citizens. No one denies the relevance and significance of secondary concerns but these must never compromise our primary calling, the evangelization of the world.

Areas of Participation

In discussing the problem of the Christian's participation in government it might be well to distinguish between civil service and political activity. The modern state (and this applies especially to the democracies of the Western world) is not confined in its functions to the administration of justice and the maintenance of law and order in a sinful society (Rom. 13:1-7). Although this definition is still applicable in describing the essential nature of the state, we realize that the government in our "welfare society" has assumed many functions which formerly belonged exclusively in the domain of the church.

Any student of church history knows that up to the time of the Middle Ages such matters as education, health services, care for the poor and needy, and the provision for the support of orphans, widows and old people were all directed and administered by the church. It would appear to us that in these and similar departments of government such as postal services and transportation, the Christian may find not only legitimate but also very effective avenues of service without exposing himself to the danger of political involvement and moral compromise.

One should possibly also differentiate between lower and higher levels of participation in government. Serving on a municipal level does not involve the same kind of decision-making as does being a member of the provincial legislature. Again, the member of the provincial legislature is not confronted with policy questions related to war and military service which

members of Parliament have to face since these are matters of federal jurisdiction.

Whether an evangelical-Anabaptist Christian could remain true to his biblical convictions on these higher levels of government, where he would be under constant social and political pressure from both his home constituency and party leadership, is doubtful. It would certainly be an exception. All too often the "lesser evil" doctrine of Reinhold Niebuhr is accepted as the best solution. Whether an independent political status, without any party affiliation, would solve the problem, I am not prepared to say. Obviously, only a genuinely Christian constituency would elect and re-elect such a man to political office.

In his book, *The Christian in Politics*, Walter James describes some of the great Christians in English politics as "one-cause" men. The well-known champion against slavery, William Wilberforce (1759-1834), is given as an example. "When he was converted," James writes, "Wilberforce felt no calling to the art of government in general; the management of the nation made no appeal. What he sought was a good cause, which he could advance through Parliament, and he found it in the campaign for the abolition of slavery."³ With evangelical zeal and devotion, Wilberforce threw himself into this movement. Why? Because the objective was directly related to his primary concern. His faith gave the directives but it also set the limitations of his participation in politics.

Our argument for limited participation in the affairs of the state can best be summarized by stating that we can deal more effectively with the world's basic problems by giving our direct witness in word and deed "in the Name of Christ."

ENDNOTES

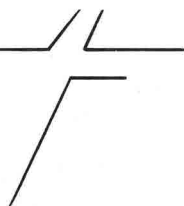
¹ See *Christianity Today*, 19 June, 1961.

² Walter James, *The Christian in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 190.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Part Four

The Unity and Faithfulness of the Church



THE DANGERS OF NONDENOMINATIONALISM *

When we speak of "nondenominationalism"¹ We are not referring to cooperation among churches or to the recognition of various organized churches by each other, but of a movement which stands largely above or outside the denominations. Does such a movement pose a danger for our churches? Many believers even in our own circles would maintain the contrary. They would contend that we stand for the unity of all the children of God! It is our responsibility to translate the prayer of our Lord Jesus in John 17 into practical reality! Does not history teach us that isolation leads to spiritual impoverishment in a brotherhood? One should rather speak of the great blessings of nondenominationalism. It is not nondenominationalism which brings a lack of blessings or is dangerous but rather denominationalism! The names and organizations of the various confessions are the great hindrances in the kingdom of God and in world missions.

In order to have an objective basis for correct evaluation, let us by way of introduction look at the historical background of these movements.

THE ORIGIN OF DENOMINATIONS

The rebellion of a linguistically united people culminated in the building of the Tower of Babel. A structurally unified church culminated in the emergence of the papacy. The so-called denominations are a product of the Reformation. The Reformers laid down the basic principle that in questions of faith and life the Word of God rather than the church is the highest authority. Where people took the Word of God as guide, denominations

* Translated by Orlando Harms in the *Christian Leader*, 15 October 1954, pp. 4-5. Original German text in *The Voice* 3 (May-June 1954): 11-14.

sprang up. Thus various churches and church groups originated because all human judgment is relative and incomplete. Furthermore, the new denominations were determined not only by the Word of God but also by political, social, and cultural conditions in the various lands. The aim of new separatist movements was not primarily the *unity* but the *purity* of the church; not a *catholic* (universal) but a *holy* church. A strong individualism, coupled with an unbiblical separatism, however, led to many unhealthy developments which later brought about strong reactions. The fact is, nevertheless, that through the Reformation and its resulting divisions much new and vital life came into being.

THE ORIGIN OF NONDENOMINATIONALISM

We must here differentiate between the ecumenical movement in liberal church circles and nondenominationalism in evangelical circles. The former originated about a hundred years ago in a theological atmosphere where liberalism had largely undermined faith in the authority of the Holy Scriptures. To point out the dangers for our churches in this movement is beyond the scope of this discussion. Nondenominationalism in evangelical circles is a manifestation of the twentieth century. In many cases it is an attempt to unite believers of various persuasions for the sake of supporting and extending Christian education and missions. Many Bible institutes and mission organizations belong to this category. In order to have a common ground for carrying on the work, in spite of differences in teachings and practices, emphasis is limited largely to the concept of salvation while the concept of the church is neglected. That the latter is of great importance for a correct concept of salvation is not sufficiently recognized. Thus dangers arise in our biblical quest for the ideal church. Since we repeatedly have to deal with such movements as "Youth for Christ" in our circles and since many of our young people attend nondenominational Bible schools, I would like to point to several dangers.

A gradual eclipse of the concept of the church

The teaching of the kingdom of God is emphasized at the expense of the biblical teaching of the church. Many churches have degenerated to the point where there is only a human organization which stands in contrast to the true kingdom of God. That according to the wonderful plan of God the kingdom of God is to become a reality through the church is overlooked. That God revealed his manifold wisdom specifically to the church is not

recognized.

Whenever one refers to the church, there is usually an over-emphasis on the universal church at the expense of the local church. This occurs largely because the leading personalities of nondenominationalism have come out of "dead" churches and have therefore dropped the idea of a biblical local church. They prefer to speak of the "invisible church" or the "mystical body" of Christ. Instead of looking for the failure of the church in its function and attitude, they consider this failure to be organic and give up their ideal of the church. They even go so far as to teach that the true children of God are outside the church. Nondenominationalism thus becomes antidenominationalism. Some teach, furthermore, that church membership is not necessary to salvation and that believers need fellowship but no church affiliation. The thief on the cross is used, even by prominent theologians, to show that neither baptism nor church membership are necessary for one who is converted. It is quite unnecessary to show the unscriptural nature of these "churchless" movements.

An increasing shallowness in doctrine

Nondenominationalism is possible only when one compromises in the area of doctrine. One must find the common denominator and often it is the lowest one which is accepted. Increasing superficiality in doctrine shows itself in several respects.

Firstly, one remains static in the doctrines of the beginning of the Christian life (see Hebrews 6:1). Repentance, faith, conversion, and a personal experience of salvation are emphasized. Valuable and important though a right beginning may be, believers must be led further than this. However, since one does not wish to be at odds with any denomination, one generally passes over those doctrines which pertain to following Jesus, building the church, and church discipline. Often one is satisfied when one has been instrumental in saving a soul for heaven, instead of winning and training that person for a God-consecrated life here on earth.

Furthermore, important teachings of the Scriptures are neglected, often because they are not popular. When members from Mennonite churches join such movements or churches, they soon lose the emphasis on separation from the world, rejection of military service, the oath, and many others. Alliance movements have a tendency to broaden out and so to lose their

depth. Samuel Keller speaks of a tolerance unto death. Many churches have disintegrated as a result.

Finally, closely allied to this increasing shallowness in doctrine, is a certain lack of respect for the teaching ministry of the church. Nondenominationalism is often guided or pushed by laymen who are strong with respect to business or organizational aspects but are doctrinally weak. This condition influences the position of many American colleges and Bible schools which are often supported by wealthy businessmen of various confessions. For example, the school may stand for the principle of baptism on the confession of faith. If, however, among the friends of the school there are influential and financially strong brethren who belong to those who practice infant baptism, the above principle will receive very weak emphasis.

A repudiation of biblical ordinances and practices

Often there is a lack of emphasis on the principle that baptism is really necessary and that faith and baptism cannot be separated. Since baptism is also the door of entrance into the church, one would rather avoid this truth. The emphasis of adult baptism on the confession of faith also leads to difficulty since such movements repeatedly come into contact with those who hold to infant baptism. That the recognition of infant baptism radically changes not only the concept of the church but also the concept of salvation, is not recognized. As to the form of baptism, it is understandable that even less is said about it.

Nondenominationalism also often leads directly to open communion, according to which communion is taken with infant baptizers and those who are not baptized at all. Members of such fellowships are given all of the advantages without being held accountable for any of the duties and responsibilities of church membership.

Finally, nearly all nondenominational movements have dropped the principle of church discipline because they fear divisions. Unity is thus guarded at the expense of holiness. Biblical directives governing the election and commissioning of laborers and sending out of missionaries are often ignored. Where the fence of specific church regulations has broken down all sorts of errors creep into the church without particular difficulty.

A confusion of ethical principles

Nondenominationalism leads to compromise, not only in the

area of doctrine, but also in the area of Christian living.

One area in which this is evident is in the relationship of the church to the state. Evangelical "free churches" also feel they have a political obligation in the world as did the former state churches. It is deeply regrettable that such organizations as the National Association of Evangelicals spend hours with the question of the dismissal of General McArthur by former President Truman. If we are not very careful in our fellowship with such organizations we can easily forfeit the principle of the separation of church and state. Many of our young people have already lost the principle of nonresistance in nondenominational Bible schools. Since the majority of these evangelical fundamentalists are also strong advocates of militarism, many of the young people of our circles come into great inner confusion. Since many modernists are also pacifists, one draws the rash conclusion that all who are nonresistant are modernists.

Nondenominationalism also constitutes a danger in its attitude toward the world. Many groups who belong to such movements tolerate drinking, smoking, movie attendance, membership in secret organizations such as lodges, and even divorce. Separation from the world and adherence to biblical principles become virtually impossible under such conditions.

In recent years nondenominationalism has also exerted a disintegrating influence in some of our own church circles. All too readily some have sold their valuable spiritual heritage for a mess of pottage, often because they were not sufficiently acquainted with this heritage. May the Lord protect us from a shallow nondenominationalism on the one hand and from a hard denominationalism on the other. May he help us to combine a healthy loyalty to our church with true love, recognition and appreciation for all believers.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The term "nondenominationalism" has consistently been used in place of "interdenominationalism" in the original article.

AN ANABAPTIST'S APPREHENSIONS ABOUT ECUMENISM *

The primary reason for the choice of my subject is its current interest. Some subjects for historical or theological discussion are hidden and buried in theological works or historical archives. Others one meets on the crowded cross-ways of life. Fifty years ago leaders in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches often remarked, "Church union is in the air." This seems to be true of ecumenism today. It is in the air. Recently two articles appeared in *The Canadian Mennonite* on the subject. In the first article, written by R. Epp, the writer expresses some serious concerns about the nature and objectives of the World Council of Churches (WCC)¹. A second article, written by Bill W. Dick, constitutes a plea to the Mennonite Conference of Canada to join the Canadian Council of Churches.² According to the second writer, we have nothing to lose and very much to gain by joining such an organization. Obviously, ecumenism means different things to different people.

Before launching out on a little exploratory trip into the troubled waters of the ecumenical sea, I thought it would be wise to investigate whether our respective conferences had made any official statements on this issue. My hope of making any converts in a group that is already officially committed to an ecumenical movement would be slight indeed. I was encouraged to pursue my interests when I found the following "Statement of Ecumenical Relations" released by the General Conference of Mennonites. The statement is found in *The Canadian Mennonite*:

We recognize the New Testament teaching on the unity of the Christian brotherhood in Jesus Christ and

* Address first presented at a joint meeting of the faculties of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and subsequently published in *The Voice* 11 (May-June 1953): 10-13.

that the Holy Spirit seeks to direct all Christians toward that goal.

We acknowledge our desire to be led by the Spirit toward Christian unity, both within our denomination and within other denominations. Moreover, we believe that the General Conference Mennonite Church has much to give and to gain in conversation with the larger Christian fellowship.

We recognize also, however, that there are some real concerns about affiliation with any one of the ecumenical groups. A thorough discussion of this matter at the Centennial Study Conference on Christian Unity (Donnellson, Iowa, August, 1960) revealed that there are differing convictions among us regarding ecumenical affiliations.

We therefore believe that we as a General Conference Mennonite Church should not at this time become members of any of the major ecumenical groups (i.e., National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of Churches, World Council of Churches).

However, we would encourage contact and conversation with them for the purpose of comity, sharing information, concerns, and services, and for witness. For example, Conference boards may become affiliated with functional sections of interdenominational agencies for such appropriate purposes.³

It might be well to state that, contrary to popular opinion, the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America is not a regular member of the National Association of Evangelicals. Representatives of our Conference have attended the annual meetings of the NAE as observers, but the official status of the Conference could probably be described as one of associate membership. As Anabaptists we have our concerns not only about the ecumenical movement to the left, but also about those to the right. We have our concerns about joining the NAE, as well as our concerns about joining the WCC, although we might find ourselves in greater agreement with the former than with the latter.

Historically, it appears, ecumenism has not been a real issue in our Mennonite brotherhood. Although the Dutch Mennonites belong to the WCC, the editors of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* have not found it necessary or advisable to devote any space to the subject of ecumenism.

Before stating some of my Anabaptist concerns, or perhaps even better, my concerns as a biblical Christian, it may be necessary to define the term "ecumenism."

According to Joseph H. Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, the Greek word *oikoumene* in the Scriptures has the significance of the whole inhabited earth, or world. In the early Church it was chiefly used as a descriptive title of councils that were convoked by the entire church.

Today the word "ecumenical" has a new connotation. It is used to convey the idea of *unity* as well as of *catholicity*. William A. Visser't Hooft states that the "term 'ecumenical' refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the Church."⁴ From the literature of the WCC it appears that the ideal to be realized by the ecumenical movement is nothing less than an organizational unity of the various churches and denominations. Charles Clayton Morrison, an ardent champion of the movement, clearly states this objective: "The goal of the ecumenical movement cannot be envisaged in any terms short of the actual embodiment of the now unembodied Church of Christ."⁵

In his stimulating book, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*, J. Marcellus Kik also gives a definition of ecumenism in terms of a biblical, evangelical faith. As Anabaptists I believe we could wholeheartedly subscribe to it. This is how he defines it:

Ecumenism is the movement in the universal visible Church upon earth by which, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church comes into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.⁶

Here we have the New Testament emphasis on faith and knowledge as the true basis of union.

Permit me now to list briefly several Anabaptist apprehensions about ecumenism as it is interpreted by the WCC.

THE CONCEPT OF SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

Carl A. Cornelius describes the early Anabaptists as a "church of radical Bible readers."⁷ C. Henry Smith claims that the Anabaptists relied more exclusively and devotedly upon the Bible than did the other reformers in their search after truth.⁸ This biblicism, this respect for the teaching of the Scriptures, this acceptance of the canonical books as the inspired Word of God, constitutes the foundation for our faith and mission.

The modern ecumenical movement is not committed to this

concept of scriptural authority, nor is it interested in biblical theology. Theology, and especially biblical theology, is looked upon as the great divider which has separated large bodies of people into different denominations. It could be argued, however, that the opposite has been true, and that distinctive biblical doctrines have welded together millions of people (e.g., Methodists, Baptists). A Kik puts it: "Hazy, indefinite theology has no cohesive power."⁹

"Pure religion" is emphasized in the ecumenical movement at the expense of biblical doctrine. Is not the latter indispensable in producing the former? Is unity possible on any other basis than that of the authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith and conduct?

In John 17 we have Christ's prayer for the unity of his disciples. Those who are to be one according to the will of the Lord are those who believe in Him through the word of the apostles: "I pray for those who shall believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20). Then follows the petition of verse 21: "That they all may be one." This petition has become the charter of the ecumenical movement and finds constant repetition in their literature. For some it is the only passage which is accepted as the inspired Word of God and as a true revelation of the mind of Christ.

In his very enlightening articles on "True Ecumenicity", Jules Marcel Nicole reminds us that we should not forget the little phrase: "Those who are to believe in me through their word." He continues:

This is to say, through the word of the Apostles. It is the Apostles' Word, the New Testament which constitutes our authority to know Christ. . . .

Therefore, fruitful Christian unity can only manifest itself in an atmosphere of absolute respect for the Bible. Where human traditions displace the Scriptures, where human authorities claim the right to tear off pages from the sacred text, there could not exist such unity as our Lord desires.¹⁰

The position of theological schools on the Scriptures will be of great significance in this endeavor to unify the various denominations. Hence these schools must be captured by the movement if it is to attain its goals. Clayton C. Morrison is very explicit on this point:

And there can be no united Church without a minis-

try that is ecumenically minded and ecumenically accepted. . . . The ecumenical ideal requires the abandonment of this organ (e.g., seminary) of denominationalism and the transformation of its theological seminaries into ecumenical institutions.¹¹

There is a cause for apprehension here.

THE CONCEPT OF CHRIST'S PERSON

"What think ye of Christ?" is still the basic question to be addressed to any movement that professes to be Christian. Some would point out that this question is adequately answered in the WCC formula, "our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." The present theological climate, however, and the diversity of interpretation given to every word in this formula, make it necessary to probe a little deeper into this confession. To which Christ will ecumenicity cleave?

Will it be the Christ of the modernist, an individual without pre-existence, incarnation or virgin birth?¹² Will it be the mythical Christ of Bultmann — a person stripped of all supernatural attributes? Or will it be the metamorphosed Christ of Paul Tillich, the human person who became divine? Or could it be the Christ revealed in the Scriptures, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God? With such a low view of the Scriptures, as indicated above, it is doubtful whether one can entertain such a high view of Christ.

The only way that the divisions can be really healed in the sight of God, Epp maintains, is in a return to the teachings of God's Word. Since a refusal to accept these teachings in many instances caused the division in the first place, it is unlikely that a wholesale repentance will occur now. The only other course for attaining unity lies in the settlement of differences by negotiation, which of necessity entails compromise. Basic to our concept of salvation is the teaching of the Scriptures that sinful man is redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Can we join a movement in which large groups reject the teaching of the atonement? We certainly should exercise Christian tolerance in connection with many marginal issues, but when it concerns the foundations of our faith, we dare not compromise. Christ has warned us that "not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

THE CONCEPT OF THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH

As Anabaptists we hold to the concept of the gathered

church (*ecclesia*), or the Believers' Church. True unity is possible only among genuine believers. In Acts 4:32 the early Church is described thus: "And the multitude of them that *believed* were of one heart and of one soul." In his prayer in John 17, Christ gives a clear answer to the question of the nature of Christian unity. His prayer presupposes a radical distinction between believers and other men. "They are not of the world," says Jesus, "as I am not of the world" (v. 16). He prays for unity among those whom the Father has given him. In modern ecumenism this fundamental distinction between the disciples of Christ and the remainder of humanity is often overlooked. Leaders of the ecumenical movement are more interested in a powerful institution, which will speak with a united voice on social and political issues, than in a return to the New Testament pattern of the church, where true believers unite for a life of discipleship and evangelism. There is much in the striving for organizational unity in the modern ecumenical movement that reminds one of the ambitions of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Until recently, Protestants were exhorted to unite in order to resist the growing power of Roman Catholicism. By this overemphasis on organizational unity, however, the way has been prepared for union with Rome. The all-inclusiveness of ecumenism is a direct threat to the biblical concept of the true church. Leaders in the ecumenical movement need to be reminded of Christ's words in Luke 12:51: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." Nicole is right in showing the need for the observance of this division in our striving for a spiritual unity. Christian unity according to Christ's prayer, he writes, "can exist only in an attitude to separation from the world which has not accepted Jesus Christ and his grace."¹³ The ecumenical emphasis on the all-inclusiveness of the church as an institution comes very close to the old territorial conception of the Roman Catholic Church. The lines of demarcation between church and world are obliterated, and a practice of biblical non-conformity and of church discipline become virtually impossible. Such an ecclesiastical hierarchy may be able to raise a strong voice of protest against government policy, it may be able to influence education and have an impact on culture, but it is doubtful whether it will discharge its primary responsibility — the carrying out of the Great Commission of our Lord.

"By their fruits ye shall know them," Christ has said. Modern ecumenism does not seem to be the answer to Christ's prayer in John 17:21. Does Christ's prayer imply a visible exter-

nal unity of all his followers?

In this prayer, the triune God serves as a prototype of Christian unity: "That they may be one as we are one." According to Christ's teaching in the Gospel of John this is a unity of essence, a unity of truth, of purpose, of love. Christian unity is primarily spiritual in nature. To promote this unity among believers requires conversation and communion. Whereas the latter may be an ideal difficult to realize in the present state of imperfection, the former is certainly possible. I am inclined to agree with John H. Yoder when he defines the nature of our task in these terms:

Unity does not mean that we approve of the present belief and behavior of another Christian; it means that we lay upon him the claims which Christ lays upon those who confess His name; we ask of him Christian obedience, Biblical baptism, separation from the world, and the rest of what the Gospel implies.¹⁴

This conversation with other groups, however, must be a two-way street. We should also be prepared to listen and yield to the claims of Christ as interpreted and presented by others who confess Christ as Lord.

ENDNOTES

1 R. Epp, "The Ecumenical Movement — Faith in Man or God?" *The Canadian Mennonite*, 13 April 1962, pp. 2, 4.

2 Bill W. Dick, "Mennonite Conferences in Canada Should Join the Canadian Council of Churches," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 20 April 1962, p. 2.

3 "Statement on Ecumenical Relations Released by GC," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 8 December 1961, p. 8.

4 Quoted in J. Marcellus Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 2.

5 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 3.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Quoted in Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons (1496-1561): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten* (Karlsruhe: Verlag Heinrich Schneider, 1936), p. 104.

8 Charles Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, 4th ed., ed. Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), p. 21.

9 Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*, p. 13.

10 Jules Marcel Nicole, "True Ecumenicity," *Gordon Review* 2 (May 1956): 72.

11 *The Unfinished Reformation*, quoted in Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*, p. 12.

12 The virgin birth is also not accepted as a literal phenomenon by neo-orthodox theologians generally.

13 Nicole, "True Ecumenicity," p. 72.

14 John Howard Yoder, *The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1958), p. 36.

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY FACTIONS AMONG THE MENNONITES? *

The question in the title occupies not only non-Mennonite historians and scholars but concerns (or should I say, disturbs?) also some members in our churches. But is this question justified? Are there really so many factions among the followers of Menno Simons? When we examine the American Mennonite scene more closely we find some fifteen different groups. In *The Story of the Mennonites*, Charles Henry Smith describes the separatistic movements of the Pennsylvania Mennonites under the expressive title, "The Confusion of Languages."¹ The casual observer has difficulty understanding this phenomenon and all too readily expresses his bias or offers his judgment. He finds the many divisions to be rooted in petty factors such as women's head-covering or in the observance of traditional practices. He forgets that in the majority of cases the external occasion for a division is not to be equated with the actual reason for it.

It is not my intention, in the space of this brief article, to give an exhaustive response to this multi-faceted and complex question. That would require thorough research and more extensive treatment. I would like to illumine the question, however, from certain historical perspectives in order to stimulate more objective reflection on this problem. Where do we search for the more fundamental causes of the various divisions among Mennonites?

HISTORICAL FACTORS

In an historical investigation of the question we find that both the characteristic Anabaptist individualism and the unique Mennonite concept of the church have played significant roles in many divisions. These divisions were often due to relationships and circumstances over which the movement had no control and

* *The Voice* 2 (March-April 1953): 10-15. Translated by Allen Guenther.

for which the Mennonites, therefore, cannot be held responsible.

First, there are factors related to the very origins of Anabaptism. There has never been a unified Anabaptist or Mennonite Church under one organizational umbrella. From the very beginning there were a number of Mennonite groups. During the Reformation the so-called Anabaptist churches emerged almost simultaneously in countries of Europe such as Switzerland, South Germany and Holland. From the very beginning the "Swiss Brethren" and the Anabaptists (Mennonites) of Holland differed markedly in their theological perceptions. At two conferences held in Strassburg in 1555 and 1557, unsuccessful attempts were made to bridge the differences between the southern and northern Anabaptists and to settle the controversy concerning the ban. The reform movements which had issued from separate origins remained divided. The amalgamation and unification of individual groups and fellowships was significantly hampered by their geographic isolation. Persecutions sharpened these divisions and the scattered churches developed differently because of diverse influences and theological convictions. Since in North America the spiritual descendants of the Swiss and Dutch Mennonites can cooperate in a relief organization (MCC), one might rightly say that these two movements are closer to one another today than they were at the time of their origins.

Another historical factor which must be taken into consideration in explaining the origins of the various factions involves the various Mennonite migrations. There was never an emigration of the whole group at any one time nor to any one destination. Let us consider, for example, the emigration of Mennonites during 1874-80 from South Russia to southern Manitoba, Canada. Initially they retained strong ties with their fellow believers in the homeland. They, nevertheless, followed a different course of development than their fellow believers and countrymen in Russia. When another emigration occurred fifty years later (1923-27), the differences were so great that an amalgamation or organizational unification was out of the question. A similar explanation accounts for the beginnings of several factions in Pennsylvania during pioneer times. The conditions and circumstances encountered there resulted in many divisions and unique developments. An understanding of this factor contributes to a more sympathetic treatment of the question.

CULTURAL FACTORS

Tradition and progress are in constant conflict in the histori-

cal development of a religious community. Both elements are important and necessary and, as long as both elements are given due consideration, it is possible to prevent divisions. Unfortunately, this has not always been achieved in the history of our brotherhood. Genuine spiritual life can prevail in the culture of any country or historical era; it is not subject to the changes of culture.

There is a particular temptation in conservative ethnic and religious communities, such as the Mennonites, to identify the expression of the Christian faith with the culture of a particular era or of a particular nation. People idealize a "dated Christianity." But whether a person drives a car or a buggy has no bearing upon the spiritual life of a community. And yet there is a group of Mennonites which believes that the faith of the fathers can only be retained in driving by horse and buggy. People look for salvation in traditions by retaining the culture of an earlier day. Others look for salvation in progress and uncritically accept the most recent cultural expressions. They err seriously by viewing culture as more than a means to an end which can be used by Christians for the advancement of God's kingdom.

Numerous divisions have occurred on these grounds. A case in point would be the seventeenth century "Lamb's War" in Amsterdam between the progressive and conservative parties. The conflict grew out of new methods of ministry, not out of changes in matters of principle. Similarly, the initial causes of the divisions between Frisians and Flemish, and between the country and city parishes, were rooted in such progressive-conservative differences. In the rural-urban split differences in language and customs also played a large role. In 1847 a new faction came into being in Pennsylvania under the leadership of John H. Oberholzer. It was occasioned by Oberholzer's refusal to wear the prescribed minister's vestments; thus it involved no more than the issue of the acceptance of a more progressive approach in the work of the church. Oberholzer and his followers called for Sunday schools, mission efforts and religious literature. The result was a new faction. Smith raises the question as to whether this division could have been prevented. He answers it affirmatively by observing that a little more tolerance on one side matched with a little more patience on the other would have made a different outcome possible. Smith, however, is convinced that such divisions are not an unmitigated evil since they often contributed to the religious development of the larger group and that such a division may be justified since the majority has

generally been wrong when such a progressive movement developed.²

RELIGIOUS FACTORS

Some historians trace the origins of various religious sects, including the Mennonites, exclusively to social, economic and cultural factors. We agree that these influences are very significant. The most basic causes, however, are to be found elsewhere. The Anabaptists or Mennonites struggled to shape their doctrine and lives according to the Word of God. This fellowship of "radical Bible readers" accepted only one authority: the Scriptures. Since the Mennonites acknowledged the right of every church member to arrive at his own convictions according to the Word of God, differences in understanding developed. These differences in the perception of salvation, the life of faith, and the church and its mission also occasioned new factions. For example, Menno Simons' distinctive interpretation of the incarnation of Christ and his position on the issues of the ban and shunning were the factors which made a union with the Anabaptists of southern Germany impossible.

The matter of footwashing has at times led to lengthy discussions and, among Mennonites, occasionally given rise to schism. The issue centers on whether one should interpret footwashing purely as an example of a service of love or view and practice it literally. This question was a significant factor in some schisms in Pennsylvania. At the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church the issue of participation at the Lord's Supper led to intense debates and occasioned a schism. There were similar disagreements about numerous questions of faith between the Waterlanders in Holland and the more conservative Frisians and Flemish.

Different understandings of the Christian life have also occasioned numerous schisms. It is an accepted historical fact that more schisms among Mennonites were the product of ethical issues than of issues of a doctrinal or theological nature. Luther's concern was principally with "pure doctrine"; Menno and his followers were principally concerned with "pure living." Issues such as a particular dress, the *Buitentrouw* (marriage outside of the church), unethical business practices, and association with the excommunicated were divisive factors in the fellowship even during the early Dutch period. Such factors loom large also in the founding of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Russia and in the origins of the Amish.

Strong external religious influences must be taken into consideration in explaining the creation of numerous Mennonite factions in America. Since small Mennonite churches were scattered throughout the country among the various denominations, they were constantly exposed to a range of influences and revival movements. And since the spiritual life of Mennonites in some areas lacked vitality, those who were searching for a deeper spiritual life tended to respond positively to such outside influences. Others, however, responded negatively. Occasionally a new faction resulted.

Mennonite history is not limited to reports on schisms. There have also been mergers, particularly within the last seventy-five years. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ (known today as the United Missionary Church) resulted from a union of four factions. Some of the other Mennonite groups are cooperating in Christian education and foreign missions. The cooperative effort in MCC demonstrates that the various Mennonite factions can extend the hand of brotherhood to one another in caring for suffering fellow Christians and needy people at large.

ENDNOTES

1 Charles Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1957), p. 595.

2 Ibid., p. 604.

MENNONITE BRETHREN IN INTER-MENNONITE ENDEAVORS *

Some of the most exciting and enriching experiences in my public ministry of more than thirty-five years have come to me in inter-Mennonite endeavors. As a result of frequent contacts and prolonged working relationships with members of other Mennonite conferences I have gained a deeper appreciation, not only for our common spiritual heritage, but also for our common missionary task in today's world. My experiences last summer (1977) contributed to a growing appreciation, as well as a growing vision, for inter-Mennonite endeavors.

As Moderator of our General Conference, I had the privilege of attending the biennial Conference of the Mennonite Church (O.M.) at Estes Park, Colorado, and then the triennial Conference of the General Conference Mennonites at Bluffton, Ohio, as a fraternal delegate. The experience of these conventions was not restricted to a formal contact on an "official" level; it proved to be a "fellowship in depth" with a large "company of the committed." The concerns expressed in private discussions and in public meetings were almost identical with the concerns which have been predominant in our own Brotherhood in recent years. I would have found it virtually impossible to identify issues along denominational lines. I discovered, however, that in dealing with similar issues, our brothers and sisters in these sister-denominations are exploring new and innovative approaches in the search for effective solutions. Later that summer I had the opportunity to become better acquainted with another branch of the Mennonite family, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (formerly the *Kleine Gemeinde*). I had been invited to speak at their retreat for ministers and their wives at Clear Lake, Manitoba. The fellowship, which culminated with an obser-

* *Direction* 7 (July, 1978): 3-10.

vance of communion and footwashing, reminded me very much of my experience in our own congregations in earlier years.

My experience in inter-Mennonite endeavors, however, is not typical of the experience of Mennonite Brethren in general. Historically speaking, Mennonite Brethren have been known in the larger Mennonite brotherhood as those who have been reluctant to extend the hand of fellowship to members in other Mennonite conferences, whether it be for worship or for work.¹ (Perhaps it has been a little easier for us to engage in the latter than in the former. Why is this so?) In this article I would like to discuss, briefly, some persistent problems as well as some promising prospects which Mennonite Brethren face in inter-Mennonite cooperation.²

HISTORICAL PROBLEMS IN INTER-MENNONITE ENDEAVORS

In writing about the secession of the Mennonite Brethren from the Mennonite Church in Russia in 1860, Harold S. Bender commented, "This schism caused much bitterness at the beginning, and resulted in long-continued tensions."³ It would almost seem that Mennonite Brethren have vested interests in the perpetuation of these tensions, although the original causes of these tensions have long since become non-existent. What are some of the underlying factors in our reluctance to cooperate more fully in inter-Mennonite endeavors?

A lack of proper historical perspective — the "grid" of 1860

It is a common human tendency to perpetuate stereotypes without subjecting these concepts to periodic review, re-examination, and revision. Our attitude towards the General Conference Mennonite Church in particular is still being influenced, perhaps subconsciously, by the painful experiences of 1860. We forget too readily that the renewal movement which began in the Mennonite Church and led to the secession of a minority group continued to influence and change the larger Mennonite body. Moreover, the present General Conference of Mennonites in North America does not have its historical roots in Russian Mennonitism of the nineteenth century but is itself the result of a church movement on this continent. The "Oberholtzer Group", which seceded from the Old Franconia Conference in 1847, emphasized new life and new methods in evangelism and church growth. It was in 1860, the year that the Mennonite Brethren Church was established in Russia, that a new fellowship of

believers was organized at West Point, Iowa, which today is known as the General Conference Mennonite Church. I believe it is an objective observation that most of the General Conference Mennonite churches of today are much closer in spirit and practice to the Mennonite Brethren of 1860 than to the Russian Mennonite Church of 1860. A basic re-orientation on this point is long overdue and would certainly promote better relations in inter-Mennonite endeavors.

A lack of first-hand knowledge of other Mennonite groups

Most of our members have a limited and very superficial knowledge of the faith and practice of other Mennonite conferences in North America. Ignorance often breeds prejudice. Acquaintance with one local congregation may not provide a proper basis for the assessment of an entire conference. Our emphasis on "separation" from the world has in many instances deteriorated into an isolation from other Christians, especially from Mennonite Christians. In their historical profile of the Mennonite Brethren, Kauffman and Harder made the following observation: "The tendency to withdraw from other Mennonite groups is characteristic of M.B.'s throughout North America."⁴ The result of this policy of withdrawal is manifested in our restricted or distorted views with regard to beliefs and practices in other conferences. When some years ago the question of the admission of non-immersed members was under review in one of our congregations, it came as a complete surprise to many members when I pointed out that other Mennonite conferences also have biblical and theological reasons for their mode of baptism, whether it be one by pouring or sprinkling. One brother told me later that he had always thought that other Mennonites were conditioned in their practice only by tradition and not by Biblical teaching.

Closely related to the above consideration is a feeling of insecurity. There is a hidden fear that a closer contact with other Mennonite groups will weaken our Church. Kauffman and Harder quote a Winnipeg pastor as follows: "... a strange fear grips the M.B.'s when the question of alignment with other Mennonites comes up. We seem to be afraid of being swallowed up or dominated by other Mennonite groups, thereby losing our doctrinal identity. Once we walked out of the Mennonite Church; we do not want to return."⁵ In this area it is also true that a better knowledge, based on intimate fellowship, will lead to greater acceptance and appreciation.

One of the greatest temptations facing evangelical orthodoxy at any time is spiritual pride. This temptation is especially great for new life and church renewal movements. Some time ago a former student, a member of the Baptist denomination, did research on the effects of a renewal movement in one of their local Baptist congregations. He made the rather startling discovery that many of the long-range effects of that "revival" were quite negative and unwholesome for the subsequent growth of that congregation. The chief problem appeared to be a spirit of spiritual complacency and pride. The renewal experience seemed to set congregation apart from and above other congregations, and this attitude made both further outreach and wider cooperation with others more difficult.

P.M. Friesen encountered such a spirit of pride among the members of the early Mennonite Brethren Church. When he was commissioned to write the history of the Mennonite Brethren, a member, who Friesen felt represented the thinking of many, accosted him and said: "So, you will write our history now and prove conclusively that we have the absolutely right (faith) and that the cause of the Church (Mennonite Church) amounts to nothing."⁶

Friesen categorically rejected such a partisan approach and constantly reminded his readers that there was much genuine Christianity to be found in the old Church and that the new movement also suffered from various imperfections.

We are grateful for the new spirit that has come to characterize Mennonite Brethren in inter-Mennonite relations in recent years. In response to a communication from both the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church with regard to closer cooperation and greater unity within the Mennonite brotherhood, the Board of Reference and Counsel of our Conference makes the following admission: "We are also aware that, more often than we realize, we as Mennonite Brethren have failed to express in Christlike attitudes and actions our professed desire for love and unity."⁷ This is a part of a longer statement which the Conference approved in its sessions at Corn, Oklahoma, in 1966.

After this rather brief and sketchy treatment of some of our problems in inter-Mennonite endeavors, I now wish to turn to several exciting and significant prospects for our Brotherhood in this area.⁸

PROMISING PROSPECTS IN INTER-MENNONITE ENDEAVORS

It might be well to remind ourselves of the constantly increasing scope of Mennonite Brethren involvement in inter-Mennonite endeavors. The earliest, and perhaps the most significant venture on the North American level, is the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), organized in 1920. Peter C. Hiebert, Mennonite Brethren educator and leader, played a key role in the founding and expansion of this relief and service agency, serving as its chairman for thirty-three years. In addition to the major MCC programs (or "sections"), there are a number of subsidiary or related organizations operating under the MCC umbrella. Many people around the world, Mennonites and non-Mennonites, have been helped by the ministry of MCC in one form or another.

The second inter-Mennonite endeavor of world-wide significance, the Mennonite World Conference, was founded in 1925 when a relatively small group of European Mennonites, with only one representative from North America, met in Basel, Switzerland, to observe the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Anabaptist movement. Since then this inter-Mennonite fellowship has grown to include Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Conferences from forty different countries around the world. For the Tenth Assembly in Wichita, Kansas (July 25-30, 1978), approximately 5,000 delegates and visitors are expected, with attendance increasing to 15,000 at weekend mass meetings. It promises to be a most meaningful experience in inter-Mennonite worship, fellowship, and interaction.

Aside from many working relationships established on local and regional levels, there are several organizations on a continental level. There is, for instance, the Council of Moderators and Secretaries, representing Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Conferences in North America. Another organization which has promoted cooperation and coordination of missionary endeavors among these conferences is the Council of Mission Board Secretaries (COMBS), which meets regularly for consultation. Of what significance are the above inter-Mennonite organizations and agencies for the faith and life of the Mennonite Brethren? Permit me to suggest three broad areas:

The preservation of a common heritage

The Mennonite Brethren, with the other denominations in

the larger Mennonite brotherhood, are the spiritual heirs of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The "Anabaptist vision" understood the church to be a covenant community of believers, emphasized discipleship as constituting the essence of the Christian life, and focused the missionary task of the church so as to encompass both the message and the ministry of reconciliation. All this and much more belongs to our common spiritual heritage. This heritage is in grave danger of being lost among Mennonite Brethren. More than most other heirs of the early Anabaptists, Mennonite Brethren have been exposed in their theological pilgrimage to various "winds of doctrine." Readiness to change and openness to new ideas can be a great asset in the development of a religious movement. But this same attitude can become a serious liability when, under societal pressures, a group accepts conventional patterns of thought and life without testing them against biblical norms and the tried and proven values of its own spiritual heritage.

Inter-Mennonite relationships have been a great help to us in the rediscovery and strengthening of many aspects of our spiritual heritage. As a young man I discovered the Biblical principles of peace and nonresistance in the writings of men like John Horsch and H.S. Bender. This discovery was of great significance for me and for hundreds of other young men during World War II, when our peace position came under close scrutiny and severe attack. As Mennonite Brethren we owe a debt of gratitude to brethren in the other Mennonite bodies who, through their lectures and their literature, have assisted us in rediscovering our historical theological roots and who have encouraged us to strengthen the "things which remain" and which might have died without this inspiration and guidance. Humbly and gratefully we also acknowledge that other Mennonite groups have been inspired to greater zeal in evangelism and missions by the Mennonite Brethren.⁹ One of the great benefits derived from inter-Mennonite endeavors is the mutual stimulation in the preservation and "up-dating" of our spiritual heritage.

Given the tremendous pressures — social, economic, political, cultural, and religious — which in many instances tend to weaken or even destroy our Anabaptist distinctives (which to me represent clear Biblical teachings), this preservation of our spiritual heritage should be a matter of serious concern and united action. Here too the maxim applies: "United we stand, divided we fall." Cooperative endeavors on a seminary and college level can significantly contribute to a better understanding

and appreciation of our heritage and assist Mennonite Brethren in their search for identity, an identity as an evangelical-Anabaptist community of believers.

The propagation of a common faith

The Kauffman-Harder study of the beliefs and doctrines of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches revealed that the members of the five groups scored high in respect to general orthodoxy. Although there are some differences in belief and practice, these differences are found to be as great, or even greater within each group, as among the various participating churches. The main denominator in our common faith is the confession of Christ's lordship. "Jesus Christ is Lord" was the confession of the early Church. This affirmation implies an acceptance of Christ's deity, of Christ's redemption, of Christ's teaching, of Christ's rule over all of life.

Mennonite Brethren, in my humble judgment, will in the future be able to make their greatest contribution to the cause of Christ in inter-Mennonite endeavors. Some of us have seen the impact of the ministry of MCC in many countries in the world. This witness "in the Name of Christ", in word and deed, has touched virtually millions of lives. In many instances this "Christian resource to meet human need" has prepared the way for evangelism and church planting. The close cooperation of MCC with Council of Mission Boards in recent years promotes such a united witness even more effectively. But more and bolder steps are perhaps called for in the propagation of our common faith in these "last days" of our age. Beginnings in this direction have been made in Paraguay, Indonesia, Africa, and Bangladesh. Would it not be possible to launch a united "Anabaptist mission" in new areas? Myron Augsburger, convention speaker at the Canadian Conference in Waterloo, Ontario (1959), shared his dream of abolishing all mission headquarters in North America and establishing a centre for world missions in a city like Nairobi, Kenya, in which all Mennonite Conferences would participate!

Another advantage of an inter-Mennonite endeavor in missions would be the elimination of denominational barriers that continue to separate Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in the Third World. Why should we perpetuate divisions which had their historical roots in Europe or America among the younger churches? Are we prepared to give up some "vested interests" for the greater good and unity of our churches in Africa, Asia,

and South America? It would certainly be in keeping with our Lord's prayer in John 17.

The promotion of a world-wide brotherhood

The Mennonite World Conference is an inter-Mennonite endeavor which opens up exciting prospects for all participating groups. It enables us to see the gospel as the Good News which transcends all ethnic and cultural barriers. It provides opportunity for fellowship and dialogue with like-minded believers from many countries. Here Christians from the older and younger churches meet on a fraternal basis, a basis of equality.

Personally, I am not in favor of a Mennonite Brethren World Conference, since it could easily perpetuate the relationship of paternalism established during the "missions era." A separate Mennonite Brethren World Conference would also affect, negatively, the inter-Mennonite conferences which have been established on a national or regional level in a number of areas in recent years. Let us join wholeheartedly in the promotion of the larger brotherhood in which we can make a vital contribution. After the Fifth Mennonite World Conference, the late H.S. Bender expressed his appreciation for Mennonite Brethren participation in that assembly as follows: "Your contribution as Mennonite Brethren has been far greater than your representation would indicate."

Through the years of my involvement in inter-Mennonite endeavors I have found that Mennonite Brethren are accepted and appreciated by the other groups. I have also observed that constructive criticism is graciously received and carefully considered. Let us enter more fully into the privileges and responsibilities which the Lord has provided for us in inter-Mennonite endeavors on a local, regional, national, and international level for the glory of his name and the extension of his Kingdom.

ENDNOTES

1 See *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Inter-Mennonite Relations" (by Harold S. Bender).

2 For a comprehensive account of the involvement of Mennonite Brethren in inter-Mennonite agencies and organizations, see John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), pp. 380-99.

3 Bender, "Inter-Mennonite Relations," p. 45.

4 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), p. 183.

5 Ibid.

6 Peter M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der Mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt, Taurien: Verlagsgesellschaft Raduga, 1911), p. iii. See (now) Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), p. xxvii.

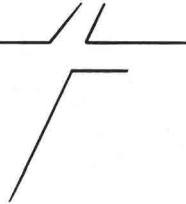
7 General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, *Yearbook of General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches: 1966* (Hillsboro, KS: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1966), p. 33.

8 My assignment was such as to restrict this essay to inter-Mennonite endeavors. There are also many exciting developments in inter-church relations in general.

9 Cf. Gerhard Lohrenz, in *A Legacy of Faith* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 183.

Part Five

The Work and Witness of the Church



A CHRIST-CENTERED EDUCATION *

A life without priorities is a life without direction and, hence, without meaning.

Setting proper priorities in higher education is also of crucial importance. What comes first in a Christian's life determines success or failure in the kingdom of God.

One would-be follower of Jesus wanted *first* to bury his father, another wanted *first* to say farewell to the home folks. Jesus told them: "No one, after putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

The first place, in terms of Jesus Christ, is the central place. *He* is to be the centre of faith and life, of study and service.

It is not easy to give to Christ the central place in life or in an educational program. It is easier to accommodate him in a secondary place, on the periphery of our educational pursuits. This is the great sin of our generation. It is also the sin of many Christian students. They do not wish to exclude Christ from their lives; they need him for help and security in emergency situations, or, as Howard Charles once stated it, they would like to have him around as a "celestial bellhop." But if we remove Christ from the centre, we reject his lordship.

The mandate and motivation for a Christ-centred education are implied in the profound passage in Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Paul presents three compelling reasons why Christ should have central place in our lives, why he should be at the very centre of our educational program. God the Father has given to Christ the first place, the central place *in creation*: "For in him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth — all things have been created through him and for him" (1:16); *in providence*: "he is before all things, and in him all things hold

* *The College Bulletin* (Fall 1977): 2-3.

together" (1:17); *in redemption*: He is the first-born from the dead — "All things are reconciled by him through the blood of the Cross" (1:20).

Let me spell out, in practical terms, three aspects of a Christ-centred education.

First, it provides a *meaningful integration for all of life and knowledge*. Today we live in a world which is broken and disjointed, not only morally and socially but also educationally. Higher education lacks an integrating force and centre.

There was a time when the Judaeo-Christian world view gave meaning to Western life and thought. The medieval university was governed by a unifying religious perspective. But education today is rootless, pragmatic and driven by as many viewpoints as there are disciplines, or even professors. The result, according to Arthur F. Holmes of Wheaton College, is a "*multiversity* not a *university*, an institution without a unifying world-view and so without unifying educational goals."¹

How can faith and learning be properly integrated?

Some Christian colleges attempt to do this by supplementing their program with religious exercises. Gordon H. Clark describes the Christian college where such good things as giving out tracts, holding fervent prayer meetings, going out on gospel teams and opening classes with prayer are the accepted practice, yet the actual instruction is no more Christian than in a respectable secular school. "The program it contemplates is merely a pagan education with a chocolate coating of Christianity. And the pill, not the coating, works."² Here faith and learning are conjunctive but not integrated.

A second model is the liberal arts college with a Bible department. This may provide more dialogue and interaction but not an ideal integration. Christianity must not become a Bible department religion. It has the right to control the instruction in all departments.

There is a third model, which puts Christ and the Holy Scriptures into the centre of its curriculum. A truly Christian college refuses to compartmentalize religion. It retains a unifying Christian world view, and brings it to bear on all aspects of academic life on its campus.

We aspire to follow this model at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Our religious core courses are built into the curriculum to serve this purpose. This calls for a teaching staff which is composed not merely of Christians who happen to be scholars, but of truly Christian scholars.

Secondly, a Christ-centred education implies a *goal-directed preparation*. Our goals are shaped and determined by the demands of Christ and his kingdom (Matt. 6:33). Our vocational goals are determined, not by the ebb and flow of the job market in our society but by the vocation in which the demand always exceeds the supply. "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Matt. 9:37).

There is always room at the bottom in this vocation, for, to use Robert Greenleaf's terminology, we are concerned about training servant-leaders.

What does this imply? It implies training disciples for whom the teaching of Christ is the ultimate authority and the life of Christ is the perfect model. Such disciples seek to bring their life styles into conformity with his life.

It implies training for ministry in the church. The chief goal of Christ in this age is the building of the church. A Christ-centred education must, therefore, always be church-related. The program in contemporary ministries at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College is especially designed to achieve this objective.

It implies preparation for world missions. World missions today calls for bringing the whole gospel to the whole man. It calls for missions and services, for evangelism and social concern. At our College, we are committed to these goals.

Finally, and very importantly, a Christ-centred education inspires a *transcendent devotion to Jesus Christ*. The idols of modern education leave students disillusioned and empty. What young people, yes, all people need desperately, is a transcendent object, a transcendent person, to inspire their devotion and worship. Christian education that is truly Christ-centred will inspire supreme devotion to Christ. The New Testament teaches that such devotion shall have priority in our lives.

This devotion has priority in the commandments. Jesus reminds him who wants to know which commandment is the greatest: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and foremost commandment" (Matt. 22:37).

This devotion has priority in our commitment as Christians. "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Love to Christ transcends all earthly attachments.

This devotion has priority in motivation for service. After

Peter's denial, Christ asked for a confession of his love before he gave him the assignment to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17). All other qualifications are secondary.

Finally, this devotion has priority in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Love is more important than the gift of prophecy or a knowledge of all mysteries. Love is more important than the possession of all knowledge or a faith that can remove mountains (I Cor. 13:1-3).

A Christ-centred education will inspire fervent affection for Christ and his people. Such education not only enlightens the mind but also sets the heart on fire. We trust that God through his Spirit will kindle such love in the hearts of all our students and faculty.

ENDNOTES

1 Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 19.

2 Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), pp. 209-10.

THE CALL TO BEAR WITNESS *

(ACTS 1:8)

In the closing days of Christ's earthly ministry, he clearly defined the task of his followers. In reading the account of those days in the different Gospels, there is no doubt that this was the chief burden of his post-resurrection messages to his disciples. His entire teaching ministry found its culmination and climax in the Great Commission. His call to discipleship was a preparation for his call to bear witness. This call to bear witness placed a tremendous responsibility upon the followers of Christ. The salvation of men, the establishment of churches and the progress of the kingdom of God depended on their response and faithfulness to this call. The Book of Acts gives eloquent testimony to the fact that the early Christians properly understood and faithfully executed their God-given task.

Our Lord and Master has not modified the task for his followers in the twentieth century. Hence, we as individuals and churches have no right to formulate objectives and assume responsibilities which are not in complete agreement with his call to bear witness. We must confess that in our Mennonite brotherhood this central task and supreme responsibility of Christians has often been relegated to a secondary place and that the preservation of ethnic distinctives and cultural values has been our primary concern. Our historical experiences have caused the development of a rather defensive and negative conception of our obligations to the world. The call to bear witness demands a positive response. May this seventh World Conference be an occasion for a biblical reorientation with regard to the nature of our task, and may it also provide the incentives for a rededication to its implementation.

* *The Lordship of Christ: Proceedings of the Seventh Mennonite World Conference*, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite World Conference, 1962), pp. 230-37.

In the New Testament the word "witness" occurs 175 times, and possibly no other term expresses so adequately the essence of our vocation. The primary call of Christ to his disciples is not a call to teach, or to preach, but to bear witness. All Christian ministries and church vocations are simply avenues of witnessing.

The question naturally arises as to the actual meaning of this term. What does it mean to witness, or to be a witness? A witness is one "who attests his belief in the gospel by personal suffering."¹ It is from this understanding of the Greek word for "witness" that the use of the term "martyr" has arisen. In the early history of the Anabaptist movement the call to bear witness often quite literally meant a call to endure martyrdom. Stories of martyrs among the Mennonites are, however, not confined to the sixteenth century. Several years ago Aron A. Toews published two volumes, entitled *Mennonitische Maertyrer der juengsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart*, in which one can find ample proof that witnesses in the twentieth century are also people who attest their faith in the gospel by personal suffering. We need to prepare and fortify our hearts for such witnessing in the days that lie ahead.

In Acts 1:8 we have one of the most comprehensive formulations of Christ's call to bear witness. He indicates the subject of this witness, he delineates the sphere of this witness, and he also reveals the secret of strength of this witness. Let us consider the call to bear witness from these three perspectives.

THE SUBJECT OF OUR WITNESS

In this passage the subject is indirectly stated in the words "unto me" or, "my witnesses" (RSV). The subject of our witness is not primarily a system of Christian principles, but rather a glorious person — the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the central theme of the witness of the Scriptures. In John 5:39 Christ reminds his hearers of this fact: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Christ is also the special subject of the witness of the Holy Spirit. In John 16:14 we read: "He (the Spirit) shall glorify me (Christ)." Christ is also the all-sufficient subject of the witness of his church. The early Christians exalted Christ in their witness. Peter's Pentecost message is a message concerning the crucified and risen Savior. Philip went down to the Samaritans, and "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). Im-

mediately after his conversion, Paul had found the subject of his life-long ministry: "And straightway he preached Christ . . . that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). Wherever and whenever this witness to the living Christ is lost, the church has lost its message, for Christ, and Christ alone, is the way, the truth and the life for a world lost in sin.

The theological climate of the present day makes it necessary that we qualify the statement of our subject in several respects. Many religious groups and movements that profess the name of Christ have emptied that name of its spiritual and redemptive significance.

We believe that the Word of God calls us, in the first place, to bear witness to *the Christ of scriptural revelation*. The supreme source for our knowledge of Christ, the only infallible guide to a proper conception of our Savior and Lord, is God's authoritative revelation in the Old and New Testaments. The Christ to whom we bear witness is the Christ who was revealed to patriarchs and prophets. It is the Christ, whose final and most complete revelation is found in the New Testament. This is the Christ who was rediscovered by our Anabaptist forefathers as they began to search the Scriptures. The church of the Middle Ages had buried this Christ of scriptural revelation beneath a multitude of human traditions and philosophical speculations. If the Renaissance was primarily related to the rediscovery of man, the Reformation was certainly related primarily to the rediscovery of Christ. As the church of "radical Bible readers," the Anabaptists possibly grasped more fully the real significance of Christ as the Savior of the world. The call to bear witness is also a call to a deeper knowledge of the Christ of the Scriptures.

The Christ of the modernist is not the Christ of the Bible. He is a Christ without pre-existence, without incarnation, without resurrection and without exaltation. The mythical Christ of Bultmann, stripped of all supernatural attributes, is also not the Christ of the Bible. Neither is Paul Tillich's metamorphosed Christ the human person who became divine — the Christ of the Gospels and Epistles.

The Scriptures present to us a Christ who is both Son of Man and Son of God. The Christ whom we serve and worship and whose lordship we acknowledge is God "manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Tim. 3:16). Only as we bear witness to the Christ of the Word will our witness be effective in saving the world. It is also well to remind

ourselves that we are not called to explain the mystery of the incarnation and present logical arguments to the skeptics and infidels to prove the deity of Christ. Menno Simons, who was always so careful to express his faith in biblical terms, went beyond his depth when he attempted to explain the nature of the incarnation. Humbly we accept this great truth of divine revelation and bear witness to it with the simple justification and authorization: "the Bible says" — those words so often used by Billy Graham, one of the greatest witnesses of our times.

As a further qualification with regard to the subject of our witness, we would like to emphasize that Jesus is the Christ of the *substitutionary atonement*. The primary aspect of our witness is not related to Christ's exemplary life nor to his perfect teaching, but to his redemptive death. It is the central truth of the New Testament. The latter is not merely a "book of doctrine," or a new "code of ethics," but the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin. The New Covenant was established and sealed with blood. A Crossless Christ would be of little value to a sinful and helpless race. With John the Baptist, the great forerunner of Christ, we need to bear witness to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The apostles were convinced that they had been called to bear witness to the crucified and risen Lord. In his message on the day of Pentecost, Peter speaks of Christ's death and then adds these words: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). The expression "we are witnesses" almost invariably occurs in connection with the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection, as in Acts 3:15, 5:32, 10:39, 12:31.

The apostle Paul made this truth the keynote of all his witnessing. To the worldly-wise Corinthians he wrote: "But we preach Christ crucified" (1:23) and again, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2:2). The church is under solemn obligation to "shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. 11:26). Bearing witness to this truth often results in suffering and persecution. In the Galatian churches there were teachers who preached "another gospel," who taught salvation by works, and the apostle Paul tells us that they were doing this "lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12).

Our Anabaptist forefathers made the Cross of Christ the center of their preaching and their theology. They bore witness to the Cross by being cross-bearers in their daily life. Today's

world desperately needs this preaching of the Cross, which is the power of God to those who are saved. Christianity degenerates into a cold and lifeless moralism without this redemptive message.

At this historic conference, let us examine the message that we proclaim in our churches and in our mission fields. The crucified and risen Savior is the only hope for the church and the world. Is the failure in our missionary outreach partly a failure to preach a redemptive gospel? As ministers of the gospel let us rededicate ourselves to this primary responsibility and privilege.

Finally, the Word calls us to bear witness to *the Christ of personal experience*. A witness is one who has experimental and experiential knowledge of the subject of his witness. It is obvious, then, that only a believer can be a witness in the New Testament sense. Arthur T. Pierson has aptly said:

A herald is only the mouth of a *message*; a witness is the mouth of an *experience*. The public crier may announce or proclaim, for hire, tidings in which he feels no interest, and the truth of which he has no knowledge. But a witness can speak only of what he knows and can testify only to what he has seen, heard, or felt. He is a herald, indeed, and a herald of good tidings, but he is more — he is an example and proof of their verity and value.²

The apostles were witnesses as well as heralds. Before the Sanhedrin they confessed: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

The first and indispensable qualification for an effective witness is a personal experience of Christ as Savior. Oratorical gifts and theological training are no substitute for a vital Christian experience. The German theologian, Bengel, states that a candidate for the preaching ministry must be able to show his spiritual birth certificate. In our Mennonite history there have been periods and places where ministers could not produce this spiritual birth certificate. A little more than a hundred years ago, Bernhard Harder, this great witness and minister of the Ohrloff-Halbstadter Church in Russia, wrote in a letter addressed to *Mennonitische Blaetter*: "What is lacking among us? What is wrong? In the first place, there is something wrong with us, the witnesses and watchmen! A large number among us lack the very first and capital 'A' of Christianity: conversion."³ The conditions in the church reflected this condition in the ministry. As the demands for an educated ministry in our Brotherhood in-

crease, the dangers of an unconverted ministry may also increase. Effective preaching has always been characterized by the witness-aspect, where the minister is personally involved in the truth he proclaims. May God strengthen our witness in pulpit and pew!

THE SPHERE OF OUR WITNESS

From the passage in Acts 1:8 we realize that our witness is to be world-wide in its scope. The field is the world, and the world must be conceived of not only in geographical but also in racial, cultural, and national terms. According to the Gospel of Mark, Christ's followers are to go into "all the world" (Mark 16:15). According to Matthew's Gospel, the apostles are to "teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The call to bear witness demands a constant crossing of geographical and political boundaries; it implies continual conquests of physical and spiritual frontiers.

In the sixteenth century the Anabaptists were possibly the only Reformation group that responded to Christ's call to bear witness. At a time when dominant Protestantism was willing to commit three hundred little states to a territorial determination of religion (Augsburg, 1555: *cuius regio, eius religio*) the Anabaptists were sending their missionaries wherever they could get a hearing. Their concept of the church in relation to world missions was a "concept of mobility." Their congregations were, as they said, "cut loose from the world." "The pilgrim, familiar seeker of the Middle Ages, was transformed in the fiery experience of the 'evangelical Täufer' into an effective evangelist and martyr."⁴

Two aspects in relation to the sphere of our Christian witness deserve special consideration. First, it has no *social limitations*. It is not a mere coincidence that Samaria had been specially mentioned in the Great Commission. Christ knew all too well that the racial pride and national prejudice of his Jewish followers would constitute a great barrier in bringing the gospel to the Samaritans. Between the populations of Judea and Samaria there was a long-standing cleavage going back to very early times. The Judeans regarded the Samaritans as racial and religious half-breeds with whom they preferred to have no association. In his earthly ministry Christ had shown his disciples by precept and example that the people of Samaria were also the objects of God's redemptive love and that they had a spiritual thirst for the water of life.

Philip, the deacon-evangelist, boldly entered into this new territory and proclaimed the good news to the Samaritans. The apostles followed. Many other racial barriers had to be broken down as the gospel was carried from Jerusalem to Antioch and from there via Ephesus, Philippi and Corinth to Rome, the capital of the Empire. But the crucial battle in race relations for the church, it appears, is always fought in Samaria. Most Mennonite churches, especially in America, find their Samaria in the local community where they are living side by side with various ethnic and racial groups. Our traditional exclusiveness, reinforced by common economic, social and cultural interests, makes it extremely difficult for us to approach and win our neighbors. In his stimulating, yet disturbing little booklet *The Church and the Community*, J. Lawrence Burkholder deals with this particular problem. "The danger is," he writes, "that the Mennonite community may be held together ultimately by such sociological factors as economic enterprise, blood relations, and Swiss-German culture rather than the Spirit of Christ."⁵ I would only add that those of us with a background of Dutch German culture face a similar or possibly even greater difficulty in bearing our witness to the "Samaritans" of our community. We may pass resolutions at our conferences on racial integration but that will not solve our problem in effectively evangelizing our neighborhood. Only a greater sharing of the passion of Christ will help us to overcome all cultural bias and racial prejudice in reaching the unreached in our communities.

Second, the sphere of our Christian witness knows no *national limitations*. The command of Christ to his disciples was all-inclusive: they were to teach "all nations." The church as the body of Christ, is an *ecclesia*, a called-out assembly, from among all nations. Hence natural and national ties and relationships are of little significance; spiritual ties and relationships are of primary importance. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither German nor Dutch, there is neither Swiss nor American. The witnessing church dare not permit any national or patriotic interest to stand in her way to bear witness of God's redemptive love to all nations. The Cross of Christ is the power that has broken down "the middle wall of partition" between peoples and nations. That is the reason why the witnessing church must resist all temptations to become identified with any political power or party. That is the reason also why she must repudiate all war and violence to further national or international interests. Possibly no other single factor has impeded the progress of the

witnessing church as much as her participation in international wars. Such participation in the wars of the world is a betrayal of the cause of Christ.

The kingdom of Christ is not of this world. As a witnessing church, our supreme loyalty belongs to the King of kings. A recognition of the lordship of Christ in this crucial area will make our witness more effective to all nations, especially the new nations that have just recently attained their independence and their national status. We are called to bear witness to all nations, irrespective of race, color or culture. We must also not permit any "iron curtain" to restrict or obstruct our missionary world-view.

But who is sufficient for these things? Where shall we find the resources for an effective witness? In Acts 1:8 Christ also reveals the secret of a dynamic witness.

THE STRENGTH OF OUR WITNESS

Before his ascension Christ commanded his disciples to tarry in Jerusalem "until [they] be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). As Jesus himself had been anointed at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, so his followers were now to be similarly anointed and enabled for the work of witness-bearing. There can be no effective witnessing without this enduement of supernatural, heavenly power. The call to bear witness is, hence, a call to wait upon God for the realization of the Lord's promise in our experience. Although the baptism of the Spirit as a great redemptive event is once and for all and needs no repetition, the filling of the Spirit is to be sought by Christ's followers. "Be filled with the Spirit" is the apostolic exhortation in Ephesians 5:18. It is to be noted that the promise of enduement precedes the giving of the assignment to bear witness. This seems to imply that spiritual enduement will of necessity and inevitably result in a ministry of witness-bearing. Of the early Christians we read: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the Word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

We need to rediscover this secret of a dynamic Christian witness in our day. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The strength of our witness is not to be sought in education. Proper training is invaluable and indispensable for communicating the message in today's world. But it takes more than a college or a seminary training to be a powerful witness for Christ. The disciples had

received an excellent training during the three years which they spent with the Master Teacher. But they were not to rely on their training nor on their experience. In our present day we may be tempted to rely on strong organizations or financial resources. These things can be a great asset in promoting our witness, but the secret and strength of a successful witness can be found only in the Spirit-filled lives of Christ's followers.

This Spirit-filled person will bear witness to the power of the gospel through the *transformed life of discipleship*. In the apostolic age, believers were not known primarily for their inner experiences, but for their changed lives. They were known as people of "the Way" (Acts 9:2). The disciples were called Christians because they reflected the mind and manner of Christ in their everyday life. They followed "in his steps" (I Peter 2:21); they endeavored "to walk even as he walked" (I John 2:6). For the early Christians the call to bear witness simply meant a call to follow Christ. As followers of the Master they became fishers of men.

Our Anabaptist forefathers rediscovered this basic truth of Christian discipleship. They believed that the whole life was to be brought literally under the lordship of Christ. In "The Anabaptist Vision", which has become a classic in Reformation studies, Harold S. Bender very aptly describes this emphasis among the Brethren in the following words: "The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct, and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships."⁶ It was this practice of discipleship that made the witness of the Anabaptists so attractive to the masses of professing Christians in the sixteenth century.

People in the twentieth century are still attracted to a "faith which worketh by love." In the early Church, disciples earned for themselves the designation of "Christian;" today the majority of Christians need to be challenged to earn for themselves the distinction of being "disciples." Only those who follow the Lord in true discipleship will be effective in making "disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). We make so few disciples because we are such poor disciples!

The Spirit-filled person also witnesses to the power of the gospel through the *corporate life of the brotherhood*. The call to bear witness is a call to a united, collective witness. The Holy Spirit created the church, the "community of the reborn," on the

day of Pentecost. According to the apostolic pattern, the world is to be evangelized through the church as a witnessing fellowship. A study of the life and labors of the early Church will impress us with the dynamic of this community-witness.

The rediscovery of the church as a brotherhood of believers and as a community of discipleship is possibly the greatest contribution of the Anabaptists to the cause of Christ in the sixteenth century. The church was to bear witness of Christ and his gospel not only through its appointed ministers and missionaries, but also through a fellowship of mutual responsibility and mutual discipline. The Christian community was to be the object lesson for sinners and skeptics in which the Christian graces of faith, love and hope were exemplified. The bane of Protestantism has been its increasing acceptance of individualism in the last few centuries. This liberal concept of individualism has, according to Robert Friedmann, "almost atomized society and destroyed church life at large."⁷

The church as a community of discipleship is the needed word and witness today. What is lacking in our missionary outreach is the impact of a corporate witness. Christians today, and this applies increasingly to Mennonites as well, no longer form a true community and have, consequently, become ineffective in changing the world around them. Salvation always *begins* as a personal, individual matter, but if it *remains* an individual matter, it is not biblical. The New Testament depicts a Christian life that is lived in intimate interdependence and fellowship with all other members of the Christian community. A revitalization of our witness will require a revival of our community-concept of the church. In the past few years this group witness has been revived in some areas by a project which has for its motto: "evangelization through colonization." A group of young Christian laymen with their families move into an area where a gospel witness is needed. The corporate witness makes a greater impact than a single witness.

We are living in a crucial hour of man's history. The Christian church at large has lost its influence on the masses of society because it has accepted the ethical norms of that society. Its voice is no longer heard in prophetic dissent and criticism.

The Lord of the church has called our Mennonite Brotherhood to bear witness to the truth as it is in Christ "for such a time as this." There has never been a time of greater opportunities to bear witness to all nations and to all levels of society. God help us to respond to this call with an unreserved commitment as in-

dividuals and as a world-wide brotherhood, and to go forth from this conference in the power of the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth bearing witness to the lordship of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1 William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible Comprising its Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History, with Numerous Illustrations and Maps.* s. v. "Witness."

2 Arthur T. Pierson, *God and Missions Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1955), p. 22.

3 Quoted by Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, trans. and ed. J. B. Toews, et al (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), p. 253.

4 Franklin H. Littell, *The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 110.

5 J. Lawrence Burkholder, *The Church and the Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1958), p. 10.

6 Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision" in Guy F. Hersherberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 14.

7 Quoted by Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church" in *ibid.*, p. 123.

THE ANABAPTIST INVOLVEMENT IN MISSIONS *

In its historical origins, the modern missionary era must be related not only to the convictions and career of William Carey (1761-1834) but also to the vision of the early Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Their categorical rejection of state-church Protestantism, and their constant emphasis on the "Believer's Church" paved the way for the modern missionary period. The Great Commission, according to the Anabaptists, applied to all Christians at all times. The well-known church historian, Franklin H. Littell, claims that the "Anabaptists were among the first to make the Commission binding upon all church members."¹ The prevailing view with regard to foreign missions at the beginning of the Protestant era was that the command to preach the gospel to all nations was given only to the original apostles and expired with them. This view, according to Charles W. Ransom, was to persist within Protestantism for three centuries and more.² The people of Reformation times looked upon all those whom they met in daily contact as in some genuine sense "Christian," and this precluded any missionary outreach.

The Anabaptists had rediscovered that there is such a thing as the "world" and that it lies right at every man's doorstep. For them "the world was populated with two kinds of people, those who witness, and those who are witnessed to. There was for them no third category."³ Thus the mission of the church can only be understood in terms of the concept of the church. A wrong concept of the church will eventually vitiate any scriptural concepts of salvation and evangelism. In the word of J.D. Graber, the "meaning of the church and the mission of the church are in a real sense interdependent if not identical."⁴ The

* *The Church in Mission*, ed. Abe J. Klassen (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), pp. 85-100.

Anabaptists rejected the *corpus Christianum* of Magisterial Protestantism in which the church is identified with society as a whole, and where it is often nothing more than an administrative subdivision of the state. As a result of this "Anabaptist vision," John H. Yoder properly concludes, "evangelism, which for the 'Constantinian' reformers was by definition inconceivable, became a real possibility; alone of all the churches of the Reformation, the Anabaptists considered evangelism as belonging to the essential being of the church."⁵

For a better understanding of Anabaptist involvement in missionary activity, several aspects of their life should receive special attention.

THE THEOLOGY OF ANABAPTIST MISSIONS

The Anabaptists did not differ from the mainstream of Protestantism in their soteriology. They accepted the basic doctrines of Christianity as expressed in the Apostles Creed. They were thoroughly orthodox in their views concerning the atonement, even though they repudiated Luther's one-sided interpretation, commonly known as the "Satisfaction Theory." Since the Anabaptists differed sharply from the Reformers on the nature of the church and its mission, the question may be raised whether or not Anabaptist missionary activity was undergirded by any strong theological presuppositions. A missionary movement of such strength and magnitude is really unthinkable without certain definite theological foundations. Several basic aspects of Anabaptist thought relevant to their missionary outreach will be considered briefly.

One basic concept involves their theology of the two kingdoms. Following the revolutionary changes in church/state relations which we usually associate with the name of Constantine, medieval Christendom had no room for the biblical concept of the "world." The tragic consequences of the loss of this concept for Christian ethics and Christian missions are recorded in the annals of church history, and need no further elaboration. The acceptance of the identity of church and society was so unconscious and so all-pervading that the Reformers accepted the pattern of the *corpus Christianum* without question, each working closely with the local magistracy. In such a situation, where church and human society coincide numerically, there is no "world" left for evangelism.

The Anabaptists returned to a New Testament dualism. For

them there were two realms, two kingdoms, two worlds. They held that society is composite, that it consists of believers and unbelievers. They regarded the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world as diametrically opposed to each other. The two kingdoms were as opposite in nature as light and darkness. The following analysis by the late Harold S. Bender describes the Anabaptist conception of the two kingdoms most adequately:

The new kingdom of God which is being established in their terms and through them . . . is of necessity distinct from the world order which is dominated by Satan. That the church and state join in persecuting the true church is only one more bit of evidence of the wickedness of the world order, they concluded. The old church (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) has failed, particularly in its mixing of the two kingdoms; however the true church must be, and is being, reestablished separate from the world. This true church is the present kingdom of Christ, which is being established in the midst of and alongside of the kingdom of this world: it is not to be deferred to some millennial future.⁶

This concept of the two kingdoms shaped the Anabaptists' view of missions. They realized that as they ventured forth into the kingdom of this world, they went as sheep among wolves. They knew that the encounter between the two kingdoms would result in tensions, conflicts, and even martyrdom. However, since they saw the outcome of this encounter as one in which the kingdom of God would triumph, they went forth with purposeful determination. Whereas Magisterial Protestantism was concerned with the reformation of Christendom along civic, territorial and national lines, "the proponents of the Radical Reformation," according to George H. Williams, "in a sectarian identification of the whole of territorial Christianity — Protestant scarcely less than Catholic — as anti-Christian or sub-Christian, turned with vehemence to the pentecostal task of converting Christendom and the world to Christianity."⁷

Another aspect of Anabaptist theology was its theology of discipleship. Basic to an understanding of Anabaptists' orientation and motivation in missions is their concept of the Christian life as one of *Nachfolge Christi* (following Christ). In their missionary work and witness they believed they were following in the steps of their Master who had said: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). The church, in the

understanding of the Anabaptists, was the "company of the committed" — committed to carry out the Great Commission. No words of Christ were given more serious attention by his Anabaptist followers than the Great Commission. In the words of Menno Simons:

He sent out His messengers preaching this peace,
His apostles who spread this grace abroad through the
whole world, who shone as bright, burning torches
before all men, so that they might lead me, and all erring
sinners into the right way. O Lord, not unto me, but unto
thee be praise and honor. Their words I love, their practices I follow.⁸

The Anabaptists maintained that the Great Commission had been given to be obeyed; for this reason, they argued, it is repeated five times in the New Testament. According to Littell, three texts appear more frequently than any others in the confessions of faith and in the court testimonies of the Anabaptists. They are: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16, and Psalm 24.⁹ In describing the outstanding features of discipleship according to Anabaptist interpretation, J. Lawrence Burkholder states that, "first is obedience to the Great Commission."¹⁰ This complete identification of *Nachfolge* with missions accounts for the fact that among the Anabaptists every member of the fellowship was expected to propagate the faith. Most significant were their assumptions that a great "Christian" culture, after a thousand years of Christian teaching, was in need of evangelism, and that the responsibility of witnessing was not the professional task of a particular class of Christians. According to the Anabaptists, the Great Commission followed baptism, and therefore it became the task of every believer. They believed that only disciples can "make disciples" of all nations. They attributed the moral laxity and spiritual indifference among professing "evangelicals" to a partial proclamation of the redemptive message. The Cross of Christ was not connected with the cross of discipleship. If this connection would be observed more generally by all Christians today, it would revolutionize modern missions.

Another constituent element in the Anabaptist theology of missions is its theology of the church as a *suffering church*. The true church of God has been a suffering church at all times — this is the basic conception in the Anabaptist philosophy of history. "All of the Holy Scriptures seem to be nothing but a book of Martyrdom."¹¹ The word "martyr" became almost a

synonym for missionary among the early Anabaptists (cf. Greek word for "witness", Acts 1:8).

The first concise formulation of this theology of martyrdom is probably found in the noted letter of Conrad Grebel to Thomas Muentzer, dated 5 September 1524: "True Christian believers are sheep among wolves . . . They must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death."¹² Menno Simons elaborates the theology of martyrdom in a tract entitled "The Cross of the Saints." In response to the question why the Anabaptists are being persecuted, he writes, "Namely, it is because the revealed grace of God through Christ has shed its beams upon us, and because we have believed and preached the Gospel with simplicity of heart."¹³

This theology of martyrdom gave to the Anabaptist missionaries a remarkable fortitude in suffering and death. They considered themselves to be in the true apostolic succession; they were followers of the prophets and apostles who had been persecuted before them. They made much of the struggle and suffering described in Hebrews 11:33-38, and of the analogy between baptism and death ("blood-baptism") in restoring the martyr-theology of the early church. According to Littell, "martyrdom was the carrying power of the movement, the triumph beyond obvious defeat."¹⁴ It should be added that suffering strengthened the witness of the Anabaptists, and made their testimony more acceptable to the world. John Horsch writes: "Many were moved thereby to give thought to these things, and to order their living, thinking, and doing in the light of the future, so many indeed, that finally the authorities in many places would no longer execute them publicly."¹⁵ The old maxim found new confirmation: The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church! Persecution aided the missionary cause in another way: they that were "scattered abroad" went everywhere, preaching the Word.

There is ample evidence that today's church of Christ behind the "Iron Curtain" is sustained in its service and suffering, to a large extent, by a similar "theology of martyrdom." We do well to remember that suffering constitutes a very vital part of the missionary assignment (see Acts 9:16).

THE STRATEGY OF ANABAPTIST MISSIONS

The manner and method of Anabaptist missionary activity was not so much the result of deliberate planning as the natural

outgrowth of their biblicism and their concept of the Christian life in terms of *Nachfolge Christi*. The so-called "Martyr's Synod" (which might with equal justification be called the "Missionary Synod"), held in Augsburg in the summer of 1527, is a notable exception. On this occasion the Anabaptist leaders, possibly under the chairmanship of Hans Denck, divided the land into "spheres of influence" for a more effective, organized outreach. A closer study of the missionary work of the *Taeufer* in Switzerland, Moravia, South Germany and the Netherlands reveals certain common characteristics or principles.

What characterized the evangelistic endeavors of the Anabaptists? In the first place, it might be described as a lay movement. From time to time there had been vocational groups in the Catholic church which endeavored to fulfill the Master's last command — notably the Franciscans. But, as pointed out before, the Anabaptists were the first to make the Great Commission binding upon all church members. The missionary activity of the ordinary members of the Anabaptist brotherhood was an important factor in the rapid expansion of the movement. These lay members did not simply delegate to the ordained missionaries and elders the responsibility to propagate the faith but they themselves as individual members spread the message in the framework of their own contacts within their constituency. The new converts frequently witnessed to their families and friends and to occupational comrades. The "apostolate of the laity" (as Schaeufele defines this movement)¹⁶ was, of course, conceivable only in a movement in which all members had consciously entered into a "covenant of discipleship." Among the Anabaptists the common distinction between "clergy" (an academically educated ministerial class) and "laity" (ordinary church members) simply did not exist. Luther's "priesthood of all believers" became a practical reality among them. The missionary mandate was no longer the prerogative of special orders or selected professionals. The Commission applied to the most simple believer and claimed him as an evangelist. This involvement of the laity in missionary activity had important implications for the strategy of winning men to Christ. Although many of the early leaders of the movement were educated men, the Anabaptists maintained that personal commitment to Jesus Christ was more important than education or equipment for the task. In Anabaptist opinion, according to Littell, "the craftsman might make a better missionary than the cultured man."¹⁷ When the missionary Hanss Schmidt was asked about his studies, he

told the authorities: "I study with pick and flail."¹⁸

Many lay members manifested a notable zeal in their evangelistic activity. A citizen of Heilbronn testified before the court in 1539 that he had earlier fled from the Anabaptists as from the devil, for "they would gladly have persuaded all of us."¹⁹ According to the sources, the denial of the faith, or even a deliberate concealment of the faith, was very rare among the Anabaptists.

Women played a significant role in the missionary activity of these evangelical *Taeufer*. Although they were forbidden to preach and to baptize, "they not only defended their faith tenaciously over against their husbands but courageously confessed their faith among neighbors and relatives." According to Schaeufele, "the woman in Anabaptism emerges as a fully emancipated person in religious matters and as the independent bearer of Christian convictions."²⁰

The strategy of Anabaptist missions can also be characterized as a mobile ministry. The early Anabaptists were not settled in closed communities (like many of their descendants in later years), and their preachers traveled extensively to spread the good news. In this respect Anabaptism differed strikingly from territorial Protestantism. For Luther as well as for the Swiss Reformers the call to the ministry was a call to a "station" in a particular local parish; for the Anabaptists this call meant the responsibility of an itinerant ministry. Whereas Luther emphasized the Christian calling within the framework of the orders of creation (*Schoepfungsordnungen*) in which worldly occupations were given high religious significance, the Anabaptists were largely preoccupied with purely redemptive processes, leaving the former to Providence. They considered themselves "cut loose from the world" in order to devote all their energies to the preaching of the Word. Confronted with the choice "between the socially unsettling mobility of itineracy, and the stability of the 'station,' the Anabaptists instinctively chose the former."²¹

Among the Anabaptists we find men going on missionary journeys, usually two by two, thus emulating the pattern of Luke 10. A striking thing about their missionaries was that they were oblivious to any borders. They did not recognize the territorial limits set by the authorities of the state, but went as far as their language enabled them to go. They insisted that the "earth is the Lord's," and claimed that God led them where they should preach. Their faith was not linked to any political system nor confined to any national boundaries.

A term of reproach frequently employed to stigmatize the

Anabaptists was the word *Laeufer*, a word meaning "one who walks or runs." The Reformers condemned this wandering of the *Taeufer* in no uncertain terms. Heinrich Bullinger, for instance, based his criticism of Anabaptist literal acceptance of the Great Commission on the premise that a true Christian remains in his calling and station, and doesn't wander around.²²

Opposition from both Catholics and Protestants did not deter the Anabaptists from living "loosely," nor from subordinating all concerns of life, such as family, occupation, education, and political responsibility, to their missionary vocation. In the strategy of Anabaptist missions the mobility of the missionaries must be considered as of primary significance. The rapid expansion of the movement cannot be explained apart from this fact. Scores of missionaries traveled from Waldshut throughout Switzerland, from Zurich through the Tyrol and Southern Germany, and finally, from Moravia as far as Venice and Krakow. The same can be said about the Dutch Anabaptists, who traveled east through Northern Germany to the Vistula Delta and the Baltic Provinces. Lay evangelists moved among the scattered congregations, "threading all Europe, and a chain of synods and free gatherings tied the movement together."²³

The real secret of success of the Anabaptist missionary outreach, however, will be found in the fact that it was a life witness. There is general agreement among historians that the manner of life of the early Anabaptists was a powerful aid to their evangelistic efforts. Countless testimonies by contemporary historians and theologians confirm that the Anabaptists on the whole led a blameless and exemplary life. Amid the moral corruption of the sixteenth century, a group of committed Christians were living out the ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount in their daily lives. In 1582 in Loerrach, Baden, a citizen who was close to becoming an Anabaptist declared at his court examination that he believed that there was no group of people who lived a better life than the Anabaptists. They were pious, God-fearing, prayed diligently, did not curse, and harmed no one.²⁴

Anabaptism differed from Magisterial Protestantism not so much in doctrine as in ethics. Luther himself acknowledged that his reforms had done little to change the life of his people. The Reformed preachers at Berne admitted as much in a letter to the City Council: "The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the other churches which in union with us confess Christ; and they avoid the offen-

sive sins that are common among us."²⁵ Bullinger wrote in a similar mood in 1531 when he complained that "the people were running after them as though they were living saints."²⁶

It was the higher ethic of the *Taeufer* that attracted the common people and drew them into their ranks. For the Anabaptists, Christianity was not merely a system of thought but a way of life. Like the early Christians, they were also known as "people of the way" (cf. Acts 9:2). To most Christians of the twentieth century "witnessing" means primarily a verbalization of their faith — they are "people of the Word." We need to recapture the deeper meaning of witnessing as an attestation of our faith by our whole manner of life.

THE DYNAMICS OF ANABAPTIST MISSIONS

This chapter would be incomplete without an examination of the motives that actuated the early Anabaptists in their toil and sacrifices for the cause of Christ. What prompted these heroic men and women to give up promising careers and attractive positions and hazard their lives in the missionary enterprise?

In a study of the historical sources one detects a *strong sense of mission* among all Anabaptist groups. The *Sendungsbewusstsein* was not confined to preachers and missionaries but was common among ordinary lay men. Sebastian Franck, a contemporary friend and critic of the early Anabaptists, was impressed by their sense of mission although he viewed it with obvious scepticism. In his monumental work, *Chronica, Zeytbuch und Geschichtsbibel*, published only six years after the beginning of the movement in Switzerland, Franck describes this *Sendungsbewusstsein* as follows: "They wish to imitate apostolic life . . . move about from one place to another preaching, and claiming a great calling and mission." Some are so sure of their calling, Franck adds, that they feel themselves responsible for the whole world.²⁷ What an eloquent testimony to the vision and commitment of these forerunners of modern missions! In another place Franck connects the zeal and determination of these missionaries with special revelations of the Spirit which they professed to have received:

Some of them run about; preach repentance to the people, contradict the ministers from the pulpits, and boast of a great moving of the Spirit, especially of the mission (*Sendung*) which they have received from God; as a result they suffer great martyrdom . . . Others receive new commands from God every day for the

brethren, and also to win strangers.²⁸

The Anabaptists were convinced that God had called them to build the true church. They were conscious of their calling to erase what they considered to be the shame of the centuries and to restore the purified church life of the "Golden Age" of the faith.²⁹ Their sense of mission found expression in a jealous passion for the exaltation of their Lord and Master, and in unceasing labors for the restitution of the New Testament Church.

The *blessed hope of Christ's imminent return* has always been a mighty incentive for missionary efforts and a sustaining power in missionary trials. It was thus in the apostolic Church; it was thus in early Anabaptism. We might properly describe the Anabaptist's conception of the blessed hope by the term "inaugurated eschatology" because they believed that Christ by his first coming had established his spiritual kingdom, and that his return would bring the glorious consummation and the final manifestation of the rule of God in history. Thus the Anabaptists believed that they were forerunners of a time to come, in which the Lord would establish his people and his law throughout the earth. Undoubtedly this "eschatological expectancy" was a strong motivating force in witness and evangelism during the early and stormy years of Anabaptism. Although the evangelical *Taeufer* were pessimistic about the social and political order of their day, they had a deep sense of destiny, a sense of being directly in God's stream of history which was moving forward to fulfillment in the coming of his kingdom. Christians who are motivated by such a living hope will be most actively engaged in the affairs of the kingdom. Joseph D. Graber properly concludes that "to be conscious of standing within a stream that moves forward to a glorious consummation by the mighty power of God alone, of such faith and conviction are ever born the flaming evangelists and the singing martyrs."³⁰

This dynamic of the blessed hope appears to be largely lost among today's spiritual heirs of the early Anabaptists. Littell's comments about present-day church life among the Mennonites should disturb all of us and lead all of us to a renewal of commitment. He writes:

When we survey, both historically and doctrinally, the ways of "nestling back into the world," we are forced to the conclusion that cultural enclaves which have lost their missionary passion and their hope of a new world to come are hardly more true to original Anabap-

tism than those who have acclimated themselves to commerce and warring. For the "evangelical *Taeufer*" linked their suffering non-resistance to the evangel of Him who commanded "Go ye into all the world" (Matthew 28:19), and they had great expectations of the time to come.³¹

The third element in the dynamic of Anabaptist missions was a *divine passion for the salvation of man*. The predominant motive in the dangerous and difficult missionary activity of the Anabaptists was a genuine love for God and their fellowmen. "But the greatest of these is love" (I Cor. 13:13). Menno Simons, the most important leader of the Dutch Anabaptists during this crucial period, has left us the following joyous confession: "This is my only joy and heart's desire: to extend the kingdom of God, reveal the truth, reprove sin, teach righteousness, feed hungry souls with the Word of the Lord, lead the straying sheep into the right path, and gain many souls to the Lord through his Spirit, power, and grace."³² Neither dungeon nor sword could dampen the zeal or quench the flame that the Lord had kindled in the hearts of these soldiers of the Cross. Reproach and persecution, as in the days of the apostles, often served as incentives to great effort and faithfulness. During the many court hearings, to which they were subjected by their oppressors, the *Taeufer* often confessed with Peter and John, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). In his "Reply to Gellius Faber," a treatise in which he defends the missionary activity of the Anabaptists, Menno gives us the following moving account of their loving and dedicated service:

Therefore, we preach, as much as is possible, both by day and by night, in houses and in fields, in forests and wastes, hither and yon, at home or abroad, in prisons and in dungeons, in water and in fire, on the scaffold and on the wheel, before lords and princes, through mouth and pen, with possessions and blood, with life and death. We have done this these many years, and we are not ashamed of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Rom. 1:16. For we feel his living fruit and moving power in our hearts, as may be seen in many places by the lovely patience and willing sacrifices of our faithful brethren and companions in Christ Jesus.³³

For the Anabaptists obedience to the Great Commission meant total involvement in the cause of Christ. It meant a total

investment of time and talents, life, and property. They subordinated all interests to this chief concern and responsibility. The question may arise at this point, whether, in the light of the actual results (although this can never be the only criterion in the evaluation of a spiritual movement), the great sacrifices were warranted. For an answer we turn again to Sebastian Franck. In the most objective contemporary account known, Franck describes the growth and expansion of Anabaptism as follows:

They spread so rapidly, that their teaching soon covered the land, as it were. They soon gained a large following and baptized thousands, drawing to themselves many sincere souls who had a zeal for God For they apparently taught nothing but love, faith and the cross! They showed themselves humble and patient under much suffering; they brake the bread with one another as a sign of unity and love. They helped each other faithfully . . . taught to have all things in common and called each other brethren They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising (*Aufuhr*) by them, though I have learned that they have always been found innocent. They were persecuted with great tyranny . . . as martyrs they suffered patiently and courageously.³⁴

The Anabaptist missionary impulse was crippled, unfortunately, by persecution among the Swiss and German Brethren and by prosperity among the *Dooptsgezinde* of the Netherlands. This missionary vision of the early *Taeufer*, however, has not been completely lost in later years. Among their spiritual descendants many have recovered the Anabaptist vision, as evidenced by the active interest in worldwide missions in the entire Mennonite brotherhood today. A return to the Anabaptist missionary vision means a return to the New Testament — the only authoritative guide for Christ's followers in the fulfillment of their missionary task through the centuries.

ENDNOTES

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3 Ibid., p. 269.

4 Joseph Daniel Graber, "Anabaptism Expressed in Missions and Social Service" in Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), p. 153.

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7 George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 844.

8 Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John C. Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), p. 71.

9 Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 109.

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11 J. Thielmann van Braght, *Martyrs' Mirror* (Excerpts), (Elmira, ON: Menno Sauder, 1944), p. 17.

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15 John Horsch, *The Hutterian Brethren* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1931), p. 43.

16 Wolfgang Schaeufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 36 (April 1962): 100.

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18 Quoted by Littell, *ibid.*

19 Quoted by Schaeufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," p. 102.

20 Ibid., p. 108.

21 J. Lawrence Burkholder, "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship," p. 139.

22 See Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 116.

23 Ibid., p. 119.

24 Cited by Schaeufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," p. 109.

25 Quoted by Verduin, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 109.

26 Quoted by Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision" in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, p. 31.

27 Quoted in translation by John A. Toews in "Sebastian Franck: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1964), p. 238.

28 Ibid.

29 See Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, ch. 3. "The Restitution of the True Church."

30 Graber, "Anabaptism Expressed in Missions and Social Service," p. 156.

31 Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 108.

32 Simons, *The Complete Writings*, p. 189.

33 Ibid., p. 633.

34 Quoted by Toews, "Sebastian Franck," p. 105.

PEOPLE OF THE WAY *

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem

And (Paul) entered the synagogue (at Ephesus) and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God; but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way, he withdrew from them, taking his disciples with him About that time there arose no little stir concerning the Way.

But this I (Paul) admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets (Excerpts from the Book of Acts Concerning "the Way")

The name by which the early Church is described in the above passages is both interesting and illuminating. This designation, "the Way", was evidently a term used by the early Christians to denote their own movement considered as a way of life or way of salvation. This metaphor of "the Way" was undoubtedly one of the most popular and characteristic descriptions of the new-life movement. Implied in the concept of "the Way" are the ideas of mobility, progress, and a sense of destiny.

It is unfortunate that in later centuries the church lost this

* Keynote address given at the annual meeting of the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) in January, 1968 in Calgary. "MCC (Canada) 1968 Annual Report," *The Canadian Mennonite*, 4 March 1969, pp. 1A, 11A-12A.

significant image. Prior to the Reformation, Christians had become "people of works", even though the latter term might be described as "good works." But the concept of "works" is a much more limited and less adequate concept than the concept of "the Way" in the communication of truth and in the presentation of the nature of the church.

The Reformers reacted against this fragmentation and distortion of the nature of the gospel and emphasized the importance of the redemptive message. Christians were to be "people of the Word." But the separation of the Word from works, of the Epistle to the Romans from the Epistle of James, led to a fragmentation of the gospel that was almost as serious as that found in the medieval Church.

Among the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century there was a genuine desire to rediscover the essence of the New Testament church. In this search they rediscovered the "people of the Way" as portrayed in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. They established a theology of discipleship in which the "work of the Cross" was inseparably linked to the "way of the Cross." This truth found its practical expression in their constant emphasis on "*Die Nachfolge Christi*." It was an attempt to bring the whole of life under the lordship of Christ.

As the spiritual descendants of the Anabaptists, and as Christians who acknowledge the New Testament as final authority for faith and conduct, we again need to become "people of the Way" in today's world. I believe that MCC (Canada) can be instrumental in a rediscovery and realization of this ideal among our people. For our orientation, let us consider two aspects of this concept. First, what does it mean?

THE BIBLICAL CHARACTERIZATION

Christ himself is the Way. He has said: "I am the Way" (John 14:6). The "people of the Way" find their perfect pattern in him. The Gospels and Epistles give us the salient features of the Way.

Christ taught his disciples that *love* would be the chief mark of his followers (John 13:35). Of the early Christians we read that they were of "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). Even their enemies had to confess, "Behold, how they love one another!"

The apostle Paul describes the "way of love" as the more "excellent way," transcending the exercise of all other spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:31). *Agape* love is not centered in the emotions of

the believer, but in his volition; hence it can be commanded.

It is the way of concern and compassion in a world of indifference and hate; it is the way of the good Samaritan which takes us to the needy and suffering, to the wounded and dying.

We have a church member in India who tries to represent this way of love. In a recent letter she wrote:

I wish more people from the world's rich countries would give just a year or two, or perhaps even a lifetime, to serving their God and their fellow brothers and sisters in needy countries. The world will never be changed without the concerted effort of individual folk who are deeply concerned about living souls whom God created, and to whom existence is being denied because the rich of this world think a one-hundred-dollar cheque in the offering solves the world's problems.

My heart just aches for these precious, precious young girls whom I have learned to love. I only pray that as I, and as they, go from this training school, a little of what I have taught them of honesty and truthfulness, of hard work and of being conscientious in their assignments, of being on time and of admitting it when they have made a mistake — I only pray that these impressions will stay in their minds, not because of what has been said, but what has been lived and practiced by example. How much they grasp by seeing! Really, this is a basic principle of learning — that of seeing by example.

The *peace* which Christ gives to his followers (John 14:27) is not only a subjective experience but also an objective reality. It results not only in an inward feeling but also in outward behavior. This is clear from Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, in which the peacemakers are described as the sons of God. Peacemaking here refers to the establishment of harmonious relations between individuals and groups. Our peace with God must find expression in our peace with men. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts believers to "strive for peace with all men" (Heb. 12:14). The unbelievers are described by Paul as people whose "feet are swift to shed blood . . . and the way of peace they do not know" (Rom. 3:15, 17).

Recently a prominent theologian remarked that he was for peace in Vietnam, but not for peace at any price. To surrender South East Asia to Communism by American withdrawal from

Vietnam would be too high a price. In other words, Christians may fulfill their role as peacemakers by accepting the means and methods of the war-makers.

God's method of establishing peace always implies an infinite cost to himself (Eph. 2:4-9). It is always "peace at any price." And it is only this way of peace that truly convinces man of the "gospel of peace."

During my brief visit to Israel this spring I met a leading official of the Israeli government who had come from Haifa to Jerusalem for a short holiday. This man, with a Ph.D. from Heidelberg, had served as advisor on housing to the government of Nationalist China and now served the Israeli government in a similar capacity. We discussed the recent war and the strongly militaristic attitude of modern Israel.

I suggested to him that what Israel really needs is peace, the peace that only Christ can give. His comment deeply disturbed me. "The history of Judaism," he stated, "is no more militaristic than the history of Christianity. The Christ of Christianity has not brought peace. That is why the Jews cannot accept him as the Messiah, and that is why we are still waiting for him."

The way of love and peace is by its very nature also the way of the Cross. Discipleship is inseparably linked to the Cross (Matt. 16:24). "People of the Way" must expect suffering as part of their mission. In a relative sense, this is also redemptive suffering (cf. Col. 1:24). The cross of the disciple is an extension of the Cross of the Savior.

How can we be truly "people of the Way" in today's world?

THE PRACTICAL REALIZATION

The very concept of the "Way" implies *progress, a forward movement, an expanding vision*. This presupposes a spirit of discernment on our part, an ability to recognize new opportunities and accept new responsibilities. The biblical maxim, "Where there is no vision, the people perish", can be applied here in a very literal sense.

The "people of the Way", as depicted in the Book of Acts, were people with a growing vision. They were willing to cross ethnic, cultural, and geographic frontiers as a result of an enlarged vision (Acts 10, Peter's vision; Acts 16, Paul's vision). The late Harold S. Bender has called our attention in a special way to this aspect in the early Anabaptist movement. They were people with a growing vision concerning their mission in this world.

If an expanding vision is characteristic of the "people of the

Way," it means that in our ministry we will often need to be satisfied with provisional answers (which are subject to review) since we have not as yet "arrived," and do not have final answers to some perplexing questions. Nevertheless, we may confidently declare with Culbert G. Rutenber: "Thither lies the truth." Without an expanding vision we will not be a "people of the Way" but a "wayside people" who cannot perform a relevant ministry in today's world.

Political, economic, and social conditions constantly change. In our day these conditions change with unprecedented rapidity. *Our program of relief and service must therefore be subjected to constant review, and where necessary, revision, in order to make our witness effective and relevant.*

The changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace is a very interesting spectacle but it has been a long time since it served a useful purpose. In our church and mission work we have a general tendency to fall back on familiar patterns and precedents, even though we meet entirely new situations and needs. It is very difficult for us to abandon projects that have been significant and relevant in the past. Historical tradition gives to such projects a certain halo that borders on the sacred. MCC is not immune to such temptations. As a Christian service agency we need to be alert to new problems, and devise flexible programs to meet changing needs. "Methods are many; principles are few"

Where are we going? This is a fundamental question for "people of the Way." *Our programs and methods will be determined by the objectives we wish to achieve.*

The goal of our ministry is indicated by our motto: "In the Name of Christ." This means that all our activity is to introduce people to Christ, who is the Way, and to his church — the "people of the Way."

May these days of deliberation enlarge our vision and deepen our commitment as "people of the Way."

Donald Hankey has said, "Christianity is a way, and not an explanation of life." This fact was deeply impressed on our minds as we listened to the testimony of a converted Lengua Indian chief in Philadelphia, Paraguay, in July, 1966. In a moving speech, Johann Giesbrecht (the Indian's new name) told us that the Mennonites of the Chaco had not only brought them a wonderful message, but a whole new way of life. May it please the Lord to introduce many people to this new way of life through the ministry of MCC (Canada).

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